


SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · AUTUMN 1985 · £1.45 · \$3.50



Max Hastings on 'The March of Time'
Leslie Woodhead's Ethiopian Adventures
After '1984' / In the Archive / Devouring Oz TV
Kockenlocker on film scoff and
Mass Observation

**Alice in
New York**



**GLORIA
SWANSON**
IN
**ERICH VON
STROHEIM'S**
LOST MASTERWORK

**QUEEN
KELLY**
FULL ORCHESTRAL SCORE

NOW ON RELEASE FOR THE STROHEIM CENTENARY (1885-1985)

CONTEMPORARY FILMS LTD

55 Greek Street, London W1V 6DB

Tel: 01-434 2623 Cables: CONFILMS London W1 Telex: 298312 COFILM G

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · AUTUMN 1985 · VOLUME 54 No 4

Editor: Penelope Houston
Associate Editor: John Pym
Designer: Don Hart
Publications Manager: John Smoker

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy: signed articles represent the views of their authors.



On the cover:
 Jinpachi Nezu in
 Akira Kurosawa's 'Ran'.
 Photo: Sygma.

In the Picture Istanbul juryman/Tokyo/Sam Goldwyn Jr/New Zealand/ Stuart Cooper/A healthy corpse/Edinburgh film/Edinburgh television. **234**

The Best Place to See a Film? Wally Olins with some forthright views on the state of British cinemas. **241**

◀ **Perry in Nineteen Eighty-Five** Simon Perry talks to John Pym about the aftermath of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In British Film Year, he is setting up two low-budget pictures in France and has taken on a small Norfolk cinema. **245**

Strewh! 'A beginner's guide to Australian television': Nick Roddick files an Englishman's report on the medium's pleasures and enormities. **250**

House Odds Terrence Rafferty reviews *Prizzi's Honour*, John Huston's gangster yarn with family connections. **255**

On Marshall McLuhan's Television Picture Who were the real television pioneers, and how soon will we see high-definition television? Brian Winston offers some correctives. **258**

Double Takes The surrealism of *Mass Observation*, Hitch's last project, a Merchant Ivory pony: Kockenlocker makes an entrance. **264**

◀ **Into Africa** Leslie Woodhead reads through his mud and mosquito-stained diaries of three gruelling expeditions to Ethiopia's Omo and Mago Valleys to make Granada Television's Mursi Trilogy. **267**

Time Marches On! Max Hastings casts a critical eye over *Time* magazine's famous 'dramatised' newsreel series. **274**

Jean-Luc Godard 1985: These Are Not the Days Marc Gervais reflects on the moral standpoint—or lack of it—of *Je Vous Salue, Marie* and *Détective*, and on the still troubling skills of their director. **278**

◀ **The Physician of the Castle** Intercut action: Griffith was not the first. Barry Salt produces the evidence (of 1908) and salutes the NFA. **284**

The Woolworth Touch Screenwriter Norman Krasna talked to Patrick McGilligan about *Fury* and *The Flame of New Orleans*, impassive actors and Marilyn's inappropriate co-star in *Let's Make Love*. **286**

Dear Diary Adrian Turner on two timely books on film-making: *Money Into Light*, John Boorman's diary of *The Emerald Forest*, and Steven Bach's *Final Cut*, a blow-by-blow account of the production of *Heaven's Gate*. **292**

◀ **Alice and the Mock Turtle** John Pym on *Dreamchild*, the story of Alice Liddell in New York and what she found there. **294**

Film Reviews The Emerald Forest/Plenty/Rambo/Queen Kelly. **298**

Book Reviews Film Making in 1930s Britain/A Man with a Camera/The British Board of Film Censors. **303**

Letters **306**

On Now **308**

Copyright © 1985 by The British Film Institute. EDITORIAL OFFICES: British Film Institute, 127 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EA. 01-437 4355. Telex: 27624. ADVERTISING OFFICE: T. G. Scott & Son Ltd, 30/32 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HR. 01-240 2032. Entered as 2nd Class matter at the Post Office, New York, NY. Printed in England. Published and distributed in the USA by SIGHT AND SOUND. All American subscriptions and advertising enquiries should be directed to Eastern News Distributors Inc, 1671 East 16th Street, Suite 176, Brooklyn, NY 11229.

Jury service

An English critic holds the ring in Istanbul

I always thought the ownership of a house was the prerequisite for jury service, but another *Time Out* film reviewer assures me that we live in more democratic times, and the obligation applies right across the social spectrum. Whether this is so in Turkey I do not know, for the call to sit on the jury of the International Istanbul Film Festival for 1985 came through the good offices of the British Council. They had apparently already tried *The Times* and drawn a blank.

The exhibition of films in Turkey is notable for a very civilised feature; there is always an interval after about an hour. Apparently this is because cinemas have only one projector, and a change-over break is necessary. A little sign comes up showing a cigarette at a rakish angle and wafting smoke. This is a cue for the audience to make a rush for the foyer and light up at least two Marlboros each. It is a good thing that the British Council did not ask Alexander Walker to take part, for his telephone answering machine, let it be known, signs off: '... and remember, smoking is a slow way to suicide.' The Turks are fully paid up members of the suicide club. You can hardly see the screen for blue smoke.

None of which affected the jury, for the seven of us were closeted in incorruptible solitude in a private screening room. We were a polyglot selection: Karoly Makk, the Hungarian director, as President; Thomas Harlan, director, Federal Germany, a man of extraordinary linguistic abilities, and who, I did not discover until long after the event, is the son of Veit Harlan, director of *Jud Süß* and Goebbels' head of Nazi film production; Jerzy Plazewski, film critic, Poland, an upright, grey-haired man whom I was assured must be a Catholic Pole simply from his carriage; Umberto Rossi, critic, Italy, who like most Italian film critics is a critic only as a hobby and works full time as a bank official; Ömer Kavur, director, Turkey, a quiet, polite man; and finally Ms Türkan Şoray, long-time star of Turkish cinema, a lady of dark glamour and regal bearing.

Of the fourteen films in competition, there were ten languages represented on their soundtracks. Moreover, many arrived unexpectedly without subtitles of any kind. To my eternal shame, I was least well equipped for the problems, all my fellow jurors having at least two extra languages to set against my rather shaky French. Thomas



Istanbul. From right: Chris Peachment, Michael Radford, Jerzy Plazewski.

Harlan proved the saviour of the group since his abilities seem to extend as far as classical Russian. A small caucus of critics could usually be found huddled around him in the dark, while he gave simultaneous rapid-fire translation of the dialogue in question in faultless English, French and German.

The jury meeting to decide the winner was a matter of great decorum, with very little of the bitterness, resentment and general outrage that seems to accompany the decisions from other film festivals. The only severe stricture came from the Pole, Jerzy Plazewski, who kicked off the proceedings by declaring that in no circumstances should Mike Radford's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* be awarded a prize. Having cleared his political conscience, he then proposed Italian Pupi Avati's *A School Excursion* as his favourite, a well-made period comedy of great charm and absolutely no consequence. It seemed the least controversial choice possible. The discussion continued around the table along fairly predictable lines, the one point of total agreement being that Ayna (*The Mirror*) was a film of great accomplishment and the best-crafted Turkish film that we had seen (of the many available outside the festival). Otherwise the general run of things favoured either *Class Relations* by Straub and Huillet from the German-speaking and modernist contingent, or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from this English speaker, and a heavy political vote from behind the Iron Curtain. The Italian vote could have gone either way.

At the hour-and-a-half mark, what we clearly had was a hung jury, Ayna being perceived as a

good unanimous second, but there being no clear majority on a first place. Karoly Makk called a break, and Umberto Rossi disappeared downstairs to the lavatory. Makk looked at me with a certain gleam, of unclear meaning, and then also went downstairs. Taking my cue, I followed.

The scene would not disgrace a Tati film. Picture three men facing the wall, looking like a line-up awaiting execution by firing squad. Makk leans over and murmurs out of the corner of his mouth that this could go on for ever unless we get a clear majority. He then leans towards the Italian and vague words drift across: ... importance of relevance to local audiences ... need for clear majority ... etc. I continue to look at the wall, humming idly. Would perhaps a runner-up prize keep everyone happy, I ask. Or perhaps two Special Jury Prizes, to salve all egos and also honour our host country? Yes, it would, or rather, they would.

Upstairs, everyone acceded. First prize, 'The Golden Tulip', would go to Radford's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with Special Jury Mentions to *Class Relations* and Ayna. The Jury then repaired to a very grand end-of-festival party on the shores of the Bosphorus. As the evening wore on, we huddled in a small library off the main room to prepare a statement for the next day's prize-giving. Servants were coming in and out with coffee, translators were shuttling to and fro; the inevitable leak occurred and news of the winner became common knowledge by eleven that evening. Apparently the wife of one of the politicians present took great exception to

the decision, and roundly called for the dissolution of the festival and its future abandonment. According to some of our Turkish hosts in the film world, there was an attempted ban on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for the festival, reportedly for the sex scenes, but reputedly for its politics.

There was however a great consolation to be found at the otherwise contentious party. The British Consul in Istanbul was present, having only recently arrived from his previous posting in Ulan Bator. I had always wanted to meet our man in outer Mongolia.

CHRIS PEACHMENT

Also Ran

Festivals in Tokyo

Contradictions hung in the air as thick as the June humidity. The First Tokyo International Film Festival was conceived as a promotional adjunct to the trade and technology fair EXPO '85; it was consequently bankrolled by companies that had major pavilions in the fair. The limitations of a film festival run by the heads of department stores quickly became apparent. Leaving aside the arcane mysteries of the administration, the strings of commercials that prefaced many screenings, the dearth of film-literate personnel and the plethora of non-filmic diversions offered to visitors, the festival's main stumbling-block was the fact that nearly all the films it screened were already well-known outside Japan. Some, indeed, so well-known that westerners would have them filed as distant memories: titles like *Atlantic City* and *Pixote* turned

up as premieres in the main programme. Not surprisingly, the relatively few foreign critics who made the trip were mainly people with a confirmed interest in Japanese cinema.

Kurosawa's *Ran* (literally 'riot' or 'war', but the producers translate it more poetically as 'chaos') got the event off to the strongest possible start, and opened commercially to record-breaking business the next day. The film is, of course, magisterially accomplished. As an epic spectacle, it's in the league of *El Cid* and *Andrei Rublev*; its dramatic set-pieces combine tonal gravity with imaginative flair in a way that evokes nothing more than the Eisenstein of *Ivan the Terrible*. It's clear, in retrospect, that *Kagemusha* was a dummy run for this. But if *Ran* is structurally and thematically much more coherent than Kurosawa's last film, then that is also, in a sense, its weakness; it lacks the tensions and awkwardness that made *Kagemusha* so unpredictable and, ultimately, memorable. *Ran* announces itself as a masterpiece, the summation of a life's work, and Takemitsu Toru's grand, Mahleresque score is there to back up the claim. Masterpiece it may be, but it is also an anachronism, probably the last of an almost extinct breed.

Some days later, when he held court for the non-Japanese press in a hotel by Lake Ashino, Kurosawa was curiously coy about the film's origins in *King Lear*, stressing instead that he was inspired by the death of the 16th century clan chieftain Mori Motonari (whose three sons were, in fact, paragons of filial piety). Perhaps this evasiveness was a tactful way of deflecting attention away from Kurosawa's manifest identification of himself with his *Lear*. The film *Lear* is ostentatiously the same age as Kurosawa (75), and several people close to the master during the shooting report that the mysterious symbiosis between *Lear* and the Fool closely parallels Kurosawa's real-life relationship with his actor, Peter. Could this be the first reading of *Lear* as spiritual autobiography?

If *Ran* is an anachronism, then Ichikawa's remake of his own *Biruma no Tategoto* (*The Burmese Harp*) is a lachrymose redundancy. Its florid sentimentality had grown men weeping, on-screen and off; NHK Hall on closing night was awash. Whatever Ichikawa says about his reasons for the remake (and he has used his wife's original script all over again), it is clear from the look, sound and casting of the film that it was inspired by the huge success of *Merry Christmas*, *Mr Laurence*. Nothing wrong with that in itself, but the

pacifist rhetoric that may well have seemed potent and moving in 1956 now seems phoney at best, and no amount of community singing in the prison camp can breathe the life back into it. One detail is touching, at least to film buffs: the now genuinely elderly Kitabayashi Tanie again plays the woman with the parrots, as she did in 1956.

The only other new Japanese movie in the TIFF line-up was Somai Shinji's *Typhoon Club*, an entry in the Young Cinema '85 section and hence a contender for the \$1½ million prize money. In the event, the jury split the cash three ways, and Somai came away with the top prize of \$¾ million. This seemed faintly over-generous to a film that fits solidly into the mainstream of recent Art Theatre Guild productions, many of which have worried over the anarchic tendencies and spiritual emptiness of Japan's young generation. The kids here are high-school students who stay behind when their school is evacuated because of an impending typhoon; the following twenty-four hours see a rape attempt, some vandalism, some 'immature' lesbian petting, some existential loneliness and a grotesquely misguided suicide. There is a certain icy precision in the images, but on this evidence Somai's chief skill lies in his handling of young, non-professional actors.

Happily, there was a wider range of new Japanese films to be found elsewhere in Tokyo: this year's PIA Film Festival (the 8th) was arranged to coincide with the TIFF. The PFF offered a selection (by Oshima, Matsumoto, Ishii and other luminaries) of the best Japanese independent shorts and

features of the past year, together with a useful survey of the last decade's developments in independent cinema and a small selection of independent features from other countries. PIA magazine (Tokyo's nearest equivalent to *Time Out*) has played a central part in stimulating and promoting independent film-making in Japan, and it now receives an average of over 700 entries for its festival each year. The PFF, too, gives a cash prize to a film-maker: an award of 3 million yen to permit a Super-8 film-maker to make his or her first 16mm film. Last year the money went to an 18-year-old schoolgirl, Kazama Shiori, and the film she made was screened this year.

The most arresting film I saw during this visit to Tokyo was in the PFF programme: *Paradise View*, a feature by the 34-year-old Okinawan director Takamine Tsuyoshi that appears to mark the birth of a 'New Okinawan Cinema'. Shot in Okinawan, and screened with Japanese subtitles, it conflates elements of Okinawan life and folklore with a bizarre invented mythology that centres on men who have lost their souls (and are thus 'hidden by God') and vicious, mutated beasts known as 'rainbow pigs'. The storyline deals with a man who innocently gets a girl pregnant, causing her to break off her engagement to a Japanese. It's set in the early 1970s, shortly before the island's return to Japanese sovereignty, and lurking in the background is an oblique commentary on Okinawa's spiritual independence from Japan. Slowly paced and intricately plotted, it has all the weird compulsion of Herzog's early films. A true original.

TONY RAYNS

Paradise View.



Specialised selling

The Goldwyn Company sells Britain abroad

Since some time before that echoing 1982 Oscar Night cry 'The British are coming!', the Samuel Goldwyn Company has been devoting a corner of its multi-stranded activity to importing non-mainstream British movies for US distribution. Starting with *Stevie*, and most recently taking in *Dance with a Stranger*, the list has included *Gregory's Girl*, *The Ploughman's Lunch*, *Another Time, Another Place* and *Experience Preferred But Not Essential*. The last achieved the feat of playing in some 600 theatres all over the US (or nearly a third of the playdates a 'broad release' Hollywood picture would expect) and doing particularly good business in the South and Midwest. In Britain it received a Channel 4 screening and no theatrical release at all.

In London this summer, Sam Goldwyn Jr—despite the suffix he is now a grandfather of 59—suggested that something in the story of *Experience Preferred*, about a teenage girl embarking on a summer vacation job, struck an American nerve; the appeal, perhaps, of youthful get-up-and-go. 'But the picture I'm proudest of,' Goldwyn says, 'is *Gregory's Girl*. It had been turned down by other US distributors; I saw it and thought it was an extraordinary film, yet the dialogue was totally incomprehensible. We completely redubbed the soundtrack, softened it but kept the quality. I believe that was the track they used when the picture was re-released in Britain.' *Gregory's Girl*, he adds with satisfaction 'went the full route—theatrical, cable, now it's in TV syndication.' Oddly, the film was rejected by the audience he had expected it to appeal to most. 'It was a disaster with the teenagers, because it was too real and too painful for them. But it did very well with people just a little older and with younger children. It took two previews for us to find that out, and it's important to know, because there's no point in advertising to an audience you aren't going to get.'

Goldwyn characterises a prime audience for semi-specialised, as distinct from art-house, movies as 'yuppies', probably in the 22-32 age bracket. Even so, *The Ploughman's Lunch* was perceived as 'a very difficult picture for an American audience: it had to do with a Conservative Party conference, the British press, Suez. We took it with some trepidation and the preview reaction was not strong. We spent nine

months working out what to do with it, did two different ad campaigns, redid the trailer. Then we opened it at one very small theatre in Greenwich Village; it got marvellous reviews and broke the house record. There was an element of luck because Jonathan Pryce was acting in New York at the time and received a lot of attention. We took the picture to Boston, then Seattle, then gradually opened it wider. It's not going to end up a big commercial success, but it will get a decent release.'

In addition to identifying a 'core audience'—in the case of *Stevie*, this was as specific as women who had recently experienced bereavement—the key to marketing such films is reckoned to lie in creating word-of-mouth. But Goldwyn adds a cautionary note about pro-



Samuel Goldwyn Jr.

motional materials. 'Most independent films are made on short money, but economising on stills is a false economy. The need for a first-class stills photographer on a film is incalculable.' Also, it is important to have as much background material as possible: the more detail you have to feed to journalists, the better. 'People say they're not setting out to make a *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—but it takes twice as much showmanship to promote a *Ploughman's Lunch* as to promote a *Raiders*.'

In another part of the marketplace, the Goldwyn Company recently notched up a blockbuster success in distributing the animated children's movie *The Care Bears*, which took in some \$14 million in the first two and a half weeks of its release. 'With an audience aged from two to nine, that was a specialised film of a different kind. There we went in with 1,000 prints and a \$6 million TV campaign. The producers came to us because of the way we had handled our own children's film *The Golden Seal*. What we learned on that picture was how to programme matinées. A film with an audience that tops out at 13 is not a night-time audience, but it's a big audience

and exhibitors like it because it sells a lot of popcorn. What we did was to convince exhibitors to split their day—give us more screens during the day, then drop us at night. The majors won't do something like that, they're too rigid.'

Among the company's production plans is a series of comedies to be made in Britain in collaboration with Goldcrest. The first film, *The Chocolate Factory*, from a script by Terry Jones and Michael Palin, is due to start production this autumn, at a budget of around £1.5 million. 'The plan is to do six and we have two more in work. Maggie Brooks is working on a script and a third is based on some cartoons by Ronald Searle. The problem is always finding material. You can't make a movie until you have a story.'

Goldwyn's own first employment in film turns out to have been in England shortly after the war, when he was a general assistant at Gainsborough during production of *Good-Time Girl* (and proved himself a chip off the old entrepreneurial block by producing a West End play on the side). 'There was a lot of excitement in the British cinema then, you know—though maybe not, artistically speaking, at Gainsborough. But I've always remembered Sydney Box very fondly. He was a guy with tremendous energy. He and Muriel [his wife] seemed to write all the scripts themselves. It seemed to me they wrote about fourteen scripts a year.'

TIM PULLEINE

New Zealand

A young industry loses its private investors

In 1982, New Zealand's National government announced the ending of the system of tax incentives which had encouraged investment in film-making. An outcry followed; the film-makers won a two-year reprieve; and in the scramble to take advantage of it a record thirty films were produced in as many months. In September 1984 the crunch came and the young industry came to a grinding and much lamented halt. By this time, however, a Labour government was in office, and under pressure from the film lobby to reverse the unpopular decision. On 20 May, nearly a year after Labour took office, and just as the New Zealand contingent was packing to leave its festival headquarters at Cannes, the Minister of Culture announced his new measures. To no one's great surprise, but to everyone's disgruntlement, conditions favouring 'abusive' private investment practices (and

tax-shelter dodges) were not resurrected.

From now on, New Zealand film-makers are back to square one, beholden to the paternalistic ministrings of the Film Commission, which is responsible for the distribution of all the assistance available, in the form of direct government funding. The annual sum allotted to the Commission is 3.4m (NZ) dollars from Treasury sources and a further 750,000 dollars from the National Lottery Board. As the Commission's marketing manager, Lindsay Shelton, puts it, 'Production will go ahead, but in a much more hard-nosed fashion.' Given that some Australian producers are able to spend 5m (AUS) dollars per film, the Labour government's commitment to its nation's film industry looks depressingly inadequate.

Over an exploitation period of three or four years, at least one New Zealand film in four manages to recover its costs—not a bad 'success' rate. But since returns are never immediate, even if the film does go on to have a good run, the uncertain atmosphere has made forward planning a nightmare. Recent marketing practice is to delay bringing out a film at home until it has clinched several deals abroad. This curious promotional ploy in reverse makes sense when one considers the limited size of the local audience and the chronic New Zealand complexes about home-grown production. A film is likely to do better if it has been sanctioned by some sort of foreign acclaim.

Heavily dependent on overseas sales, and with the old problem of how to make indigenous films that still have international appeal, the film industry is also under Government pressure to promote the image of New Zealand abroad, for the benefit of trade and tourism. To their credit, almost all the eleven films shown at Cannes (the biggest number yet) have found one or more prospective buyers, mostly from English-speaking countries.

Titles to look out for include *Sylvia*, about the life of New Zealand teacher and writer Sylvia Ashton Warner. Directed by Michael Firth and starring Eleanor David, the film is to be released in the US and Canada by MGM-UA, as is Ian Mune's Kiwi Western *Came a Hot Friday*. A British television sale of a very European-style film is about to be settled for John Reid's *Leave All Fair*. Starring John Gielgud and Jane Birkin, it treats the subject of Middleton Murry's questionable editing of Katherine Mansfield's letters and journals, published after the young writer's death. In a more commercial vein, *Shaker Run*, a car-



Leave All Fair: Jane Birkin as Katherine Mansfield.

chase thriller directed by Bruce Morrison, boasts an impressive list of overseas sales. Virgin Films are negotiating a deal with the all-woman production team of a light-hearted feminist thriller, *Mr Wrong*, directed by Gaylene Preston, and *Kingpin*, about the trials of adolescent Maoris in a boys' home, is to get worldwide video distribution. Geoff Murphy, who made *Goodbye Pork Pie* and *Utu*, has attracted American buyers with his chillingly futuristic *Quiet Earth*. And David Blyth's award-winning science fiction thriller, *Death Warmed Up*, has been sold as far afield as Japan by its Los Angeles-based promoters, Skouras Pictures.

BELINDA MEARES

Stuart Cooper

From 'The Dirty Dozen' to 'A.D.'

A \$25 million budget, 220-day schedule, 400 speaking roles, 1,500 extras, 76 sets... The statistics are those of a 12-hour mini-series for television called *A.D.*, which traces the progress of Christianity during the 35 years after the Crucifixion. It was shown on American television last Easter and has been bought by the BBC. Its director, intriguingly, is Stuart Cooper, an American who spent his formative years as a film-maker in Britain, and who had never before spent more than a million on a film.

Cooper, now 43, originally came to Britain to take up a scholarship at RADA. His most significant role as an actor was in *The Dirty Dozen*, where he played one of the twelve convicts turned soldier; and, ironically, it was that part which shifted his career from acting to film-making. He didn't like the film's sham heroics, gradually found himself losing interest in the character he was playing, but became more and more involved in the technical

process of film-making. He made an award-winning documentary, *A Test of Violence*, based on the paintings of the Spanish artist Juan Genoves, and later *Kelly Country*, about the painter Sidney Nolan. In 1974 he directed his first feature, an adaptation of David Halliwell's play *Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs*, produced (on a shoestring) by George Harrison and featuring John Hurt and David Warner.

Overlord (1975) combined Second World War footage, making up about a quarter of the finished film, with reconstructed action shot through 40-year-old lenses to present a human document focused on D-Day. But good reviews and helpful Fleet Street features on the back of even more awards were not enough to shift Cooper's career into overdrive. He struggled to put together a third feature, *The Disappearance* (1977), a dense thriller scripted by Paul Mayersberg and starring Donald Sutherland, which was eventually made as an Anglo-Canadian co-production and managed only a limited release.

After that, Cooper seemed virtually to disappear himself. It turned out that he had tried, without success, to film both Patrick White's *Voss* and Christopher Hudson's *The Final Act*. Cut to California in 1981 where a cable channel, Z, had the idea of programming a month of Cooper's movies. An interested viewer was the Italian producer Vincenzo Labella, already responsible for such series as *Jesus of Nazareth* and *Moses*, who was setting up A.D. for NBC and sponsors Proctor and Gamble. Labella particularly liked *Overlord*, and the way Cooper had handled a great event in almost documentary fashion.

'A.D. really arrived out of nowhere,' Cooper says. 'Labella said that he wanted a hard-hitting narrative line but didn't want to work with television directors. He wanted a film-maker. Where we were particularly fortunate was in having Anthony Burgess to write the series. He has such an acute knowledge of history.' The cast, which shifted in and out of Tunisia for almost a year, included James Mason, Colleen Dewhurst, Susan Sarandon, Anthony Andrews, Ben Vereen, Ava Gardner and John Houseman. Cooper admitted that after some fifteen years away from home he felt he had 'penetrated England as far as I could. I found I had also lost the American sense of narrative film-making.' Now he hopes to return with a vengeance to a film-making career that has been curiously, and unwarrantedly, sporadic.

QUENTIN FALK

The Healthy Corpse

Looking back from British Film Year

In April 1973 a conference was held at the National Film Theatre under the title *Who Killed British Cinema?* I took notes, and in the light of British Film Year they make interesting reading.

Mike Leigh said that, as an independent film-maker, it was impossible not to be pessimistic and ultimately cynical about the possibility of plying one's trade. 'You can sell your soul in a way that I needn't define. Working this way means being around while celluloid is exposed through the gate. There are several efficient and productive film schools, and a growing population of serious film-makers with little possibility of taking part in film culture—not in the highbrow sense. When you consider the existence of so many of us, it is very depressing. There is no possibility here of creating the kind of cinema seen elsewhere. All that is left is to go into tv, sell out and make sex films, use the amazingly limited BFI Production Board. And the fourth outlet: the underground.'

Percy Livingstone of Twentieth Century Fox said the title of the conference reminded him of the two old ladies—one died and the other said, 'Doesn't she look beautiful. Her weekend in Blackpool did her the world of good.' British cinema, he said, is far from dead. Over the last two years there has been a complete revolution. What we must con-

sider is what the public themselves require. Cinema is now catering for minorities. This is good. It has stimulated great activity recently—complexes, tripling and quadrupling. Today there is practically no film that cannot be given adequate exposure. The public themselves chooses, aided by a quarter of a million pounds free publicity. It is not generally known that the National Film School is encouraged by the commercial trade. It receives a substantial grant from the British Film Production Fund. The industry looks forward to the talent it will produce. There is a complete revolution for the better—on both the production and exhibition side. 'I have never come across a healthier corpse in my life.'

David Williams, manager of the Sheffield Cineplex, said that he had left the circuit he worked for after 22 years, at last able to open his own business. He had three auditoria, a bar, a multi-storey carpark. 'You can even book seats at night. I am in the middle of Sheffield. I never see a film-maker in Sheffield. I have to beg to get my films. Distributors are all chiefs and no Indians. By the time I've arranged to book the film it is too late—people have forgotten it. I would like to play Mike Leigh's film, but I'd be terrified. Who in Sheffield would like to see *Bleak Moments*? I'm having the bleak moments! The industry has never pulled as a team. There is a hell of a lot wrong.'

Alan Sapper, of ACTT, thought the title of the debate was inept and depressing. 'Who is trying to murder the film industry? It is a

complex *policier*. Take exhibitors. Where I live in Ealing, if I don't take the local paper, I have no way of knowing what's on. I cannot find out when a film is being shown unless I ring the cinema. Surely it has occurred to exhibitors that there should be a British Standard Time for entertainment?

'Entertainment! In the summer, the local announces a film and my kids say they have seen it twice before—once on tv and once last holidays. A cinema will exhibit the film it is directed to exhibit. If it cost over \$8 million they'll keep it on for two weeks and say it's by Public Demand. What is the function of a distributor? They could go out the window and no one would miss them. No other product has to have the sort of margin demanded by distributors.'

Independent producers disappeared, he said, because there was a shelf life of three and a half years before their film got a showing—despite festival prizes. 'We are fighting in the trade unions to preserve the studios. You have to go back 150 years—or 25 years in the docks—to appreciate how the film technician is treated. ACTT has 6,000 registered film-makers. How many are permanently employed? 165. 'You, you and you,' they say. 'Not you, you're a trouble-maker.' And after the film, they're thanked and thrown away. Others are treated like dockers, picked up at the dock gates.

'We live in a competitive society—make a profit and die—don't make a profit and we'll murder you. The problem isn't a lack of talent. I wouldn't mind if, in saying *We Must Make Money*, they did it efficiently and well. They don't. There must be government intervention on a massive and comprehensive scale. They must underwrite the industry.'

KEVIN BROWNLOW

Stuart Cooper's A.D.



Edinburgh film

'My Beautiful Laundrette', an unlikely love affair

The original intention had been to focus on British cinema, said Jim Hickey, director of the Edinburgh Film Festival. It had not, unfortunately, quite come off, and a distinct transatlantic flavour seemed to dominate this year's festival, from Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, through a Guardian Lecture by Ed Asner (television's Lou Grant), to the US/Brazilian *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and Susan Seidelman's crazy comedy *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Interesting stuff here, but nothing particularly

new. To test the culture rather than the marketplace one looked, of course, to the sidebar events. And here British cinema was widely represented: by the reconstructed *Colonel Blimp*, new National Film and Television School productions, films from Derek Jarman and the Arts Council, and the exciting 'scratch videos', in which sounds and images from broadcast TV are re-edited to the rhythms of disco-funk to often subversive effect.

The surprise hit in all this was *My Beautiful Laundrette*, directed for TV by Stephen Frears. Hanif Kureishi's brilliant script details the love affair of Johnny, a white working-class youth with former National Front connections, and Omar, a South London Asian torn between the aspirations of his impoverished socialist father and the get-rich-quick philosophy of his unscrupulous uncle. Made with economy and a notable sensitivity to the complexities of a multi-racial society shot through with colonial attitudes, the film combines comedy and fantasy to effect: pleasurable, provocative and disturbing, one of the highlights of British Film Year. Step forward a theatrical distributor.

The affair at the centre of *My Beautiful Laundrette* was interestingly paralleled in Derek Jarman's homo-erotic film poems *The Dream Machine* and *Imagining October*, curtain-raisers for his new *The Angelic Conversation*. In person, Jarman once again criticised the cultural poverty of the 'British cinema renaissance' and argued for diverse voices addressed to small specific audiences. The films themselves are a visual feast, recalling the formal experiments of Brakhage, Anger and Cocteau; *The Angelic Conversation*, however, remains within painterly and literary rather than cinematic traditions, and is marked by a somewhat conventional match of sound and image. Accompanying Jarman's feature was Ron Peck's amusing ruminations on the pleasures and dangers of an amateur photographer's preoccupation, *What Can I Do with a Male Nude?*

Unlike Ken Russell's *Crimes of Passion*, a dubious, not to say patronising and misogynistic moral tale about the perils of sexual repression, Elfi Mikesch and Monika Treut's *Seduction: the Cruel Woman* (West Germany) will have nothing to do with moralising. Its subject is Wanda, dominatrix and owner of an art gallery, her many slave-lovers and the nature of the bonds which unite them. The film-makers present their characters (from a lesbian standpoint) as abstract figures in fantasy scenarios; a strategy which lends the enterprise a certain rigour,



Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

but also tips it into the trap of presenting devotees of sado-masochism as an elite separated from the rest of society.

By contrast, *Before Stonewall*, a documentary by Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss, traces the historical isolation of gay communities in the United States through archive footage, reminiscences, snapshots and interviews cut together with songs. The resulting kaleidoscope is outrageous, defiant, jaunty and at times poignant. Although it ends on a high note, the 1969 gay riots at New York's Stonewall Inn, *Before Stonewall* would have us see its gay communities not as an elite but as victims of intolerance and injustice.

Amid all this confusion about sexual politics, *Love Letters* stood out: an intelligent use of fiction as a means of exploring a woman's fantasies. Written and directed by Amy Jones and produced by Roger Corman, the film has been much praised in the United States for Jamie Lee Curtis' powerful performance as the young woman whose fixation on the love letters of her recently dead mother leads to a disastrous affair with an older married man (James Keach). Playing traditional notions of romance based on non-consummation and self-sacrifice against post-feminist ideas of immediate sexual gratification, the film reveals a darker side of love as the woman is driven to act out her unsatisfactory relationship with her own mother and father through a destructive obsession with her lover and his family. Less florid than *Crimes of Passion*, it delivers a far more devastating analysis of contemporary sexual mores.

Relief from the erotica was provided by a body of new films

from China and Japan. In Edward Yang's *Taipei Story*, from Taiwan, the city background is subtly used to explore the old theme of alienation which comes hard on the heels of the changes wrought in society by big business, consumerism and the new morality. Mute and slow-paced, this finely observed film contrasts traditional Chinese locations with modern westernised buildings and decor, and finds both empty and unsatisfactory. The tone is reminiscent of Wim Wenders.

In a different key, *Hong Kong 1941*, directed by Leong Po-Chih, one of several recent Hong Kong films to deal with the fall of the territory to the Japanese, mixes melodrama, sensational violence, action and politics. Against the background of a poverty-stricken and demoralised Hong Kong, it traces the growing friendship of a bizarre threesome, a young actor, a factory worker and the epileptic daughter of the factory owner. As the corrupt older generation takes the easier path of collaboration with the Japanese, the trio decides to give up dreams of escape to fight the horrors visited on the ordinary people by those in power.

From Japan, Go Riju's *Blind Alley* is an amusing play on diary/documentary film-making. Ruminating on his inability to give direction to his work, a filmmaker lights upon an aimless young truck-driver who agrees to act as his subject. As the relationship between the film-maker and his interviewee develops, so the truck-driver's resistance to the invasion of his privacy grows, until a climactic sequence abruptly overturns the audience's voyeuristic involvement in the filmed events.

PAM COOK

Edinburgh television

'And the centre has got the shakes'

The current management crisis at the BBC can be summed up in the same question that was asked at the 1984 Edinburgh Television Festival. 'Can the Centre Hold?' Last year, it was asked for the wrong reasons and so the answers were wrong too. This year, we got the question right and the answer right. The answer is probably 'no'.

Last year the festival was concerned with new technologies, and the confusion over the nature of satellite broadcasting was bad enough. But this year's confusion over basic principles and objectives was much worse. In the discussion of direct broadcasting satellites (DBS), it was never decided whether the new satellite services should be public service channels or should be given a free rein to compete in the market. This uncertainty over the new services led many people to ask awkward questions about the existing services. These, too, were not resolved.

So, the centre has begun to crack. The crack-up may be irreparable because its causes are not external factors like new technologies or regulatory changes. The root cause is internal dissension, which is always much more serious. Of course, the BBC and IBA/ITV face increasing competition (or, rather, they face a marketplace in which more competition is possible). Of course, the present government is wrong-headed if not hostile. But, as Paul Bonner and Jeremy Isaacs pointed out, such external threats can be overcome. New technologies can provide opportunities as much as opposition. Competitive channels can be matched. Hostile politicians can be faced up to, or isolated. Jeremy Isaacs went further, to the surprise of many, when he said broadcasters should cultivate friends in the establishment. But all these activities require the broadcasters at the centre to stand firm: to know where they stand and what they stand for. And the centre has got the shakes.

This realisation that the centre cannot hold was the real reason why the 500 participants sent such a strong yet level-headed message to the BBC Governors to protest at their decision to stop the transmission of the 'Real Lives' documentary on Northern Ireland, *At the Edge of the Union*. Programmes have been banned before, and protests made, but this was different. The session started, dramatically enough,

IN THE PICTURE

with a showing of the film in the BBC studio. Afterwards, the participants spoke not in anger but in despair. A large number of programme-makers and executives, from a former Managing Director, BBC TV, to the editor of 'Diverse Reports', pointed out with studied clarity the dangers and stupidities of the Governors' decisions. In the past, someone said, Auntie may have made mistakes but she never jeopardised her authority. She had never turned against the family. This time, the family began to wonder if the old girl was still in control of her faculties.

Her virtues are strong ones, and familiar. While at Edinburgh, I happened to see a copy of the book Charles Curran wrote after retiring as Director-General in 1977. I was reminded of his remark that the BBC's claim to its international prestige rested upon its 'competent integrity'. In recent months, the Corporation is perceived to have lost some of that competence and some of that integrity. Once lost, such qualities are hard to win back.

Sir Charles' book is called *A Seamless Robe*, which is ironic enough in the light of recent claims about what exactly constitutes the BBC. But—added irony—I read it while waiting for Stephen Frears' new film, *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which strikingly recalls the outstanding work that Frears did for the BBC in the early 70s, when in three marvellous years he made *A Day Out*, *England, Their England*, *Match of the Day* and *Sunset Across the Bay*. It's quintessentially a television film, commissioned by Channel 4 and amply fulfilling the desire of 'Film on Four' for intelligent, topical and highly enjoyable movies. Frears said that he wants it shown on television because he wants it to be seen by lots of people and talked about. It is the voice of the professional broadcaster.

How long will TV speak with that voice? Twenty years ago an American film producer said that the British film industry was alive and well and living in television. The results, from 'Armchair Theatre' to 'Film on Four', have been remarkable and enviable. But at what cost? For some it's been a good living. For others, a bit of a struggle. At Edinburgh, Michael Grade, Controller BBC1, complained that independent producers were always talking about money while he was only interested in ideas, and good ideas at that. To which John Gau, Chairman of IPPA, responded wryly by quoting Rockefeller's justification to a beggar whom he had spurned for years: 'Can't you think of anything except money?' Well, yes, but money helps.

Both discussions on the relationship of TV and film were bureaucratic and defensive. Few people spoke positively either about content or about form. Paul Bonner spoke of laagers at Shepherd's Bush and urged producers and directors to break out. He said people should make their own markets and reach their own audiences. Strong stuff, and not without problems, but a reasonable strategy. A necessary one, too, if the good work that is being made, and that could be made, is to reach an audience.

As Colin Young said, we should concentrate on producing good, innovative ways of creating images and telling stories which mean something, rather than worrying whether one form is better than another, or one distribution system is better than another. After a hundred years of fruitless argument about whether libraries and bookshops are good for each other, we should be spared the same conundrum about cinema and television.

One reason, perhaps, for the current crisis is that the people at the centre seem to spend so much time worrying about these questions. British broadcasting has such a high reputation because both the BBC and IBA/ITV systems have given first priority to the programme-maker. The 'competent integrity' upheld by Charles Curran has been based firmly on the programme-makers' sense of themselves and their task rather than the institutional infrastructure. In recent months, however, the BBC and IBA/ITV have seemed to spend an undue amount of their energies on institutional and corporate affairs; even, it was said, to the extent of replacing the programme-makers' sense of integrity with the businessman's sense of responsibility. It was also suggested that the BBC and ITV companies ventured into satellite broadcasting for reasons that had little to do with programmes. These thoughts were only suppositions, but in the absence of clear statements to the contrary, such perceptions become important.

This is the true nature of the crisis. The BBC's public traditions make it more vulnerable to these accusations, but the IBA/ITV system faces similar problems. For entirely honourable reasons, managements throughout the industry have their eyes fixed so attentively on future corporate possibilities that they do not seem to give proper attention to the thousands of people who are responsible for today's practicalities and programmes. Or so those thousands seem to believe. That is why people at Edinburgh were so angry and so despairing and why the centre may not hold.

JOHN HOWKINS

For All Film Buffs

THE ILLUSTRATED DIRECTORY OF FILM CHARACTER ACTORS

David Quinlan

Not just the good, the bad and the ugly, but also the fat, the thin, the gloomy, the cheerful, the prissy and the pompous... all in David Quinlan's guide to over 850 actors and actresses who walked into a film, stole a scene and walked out again, probably to upstage a different star in a different film later that week!

A companion to the widely acclaimed *Illustrated*

Directory of Film Stars, this book provides concise accounts of the careers and salient characteristics of 850 character stars and supporting players, all illustrated and accompanied by complete filmographies.

£17.50 Hardback 384 pages 850 illus October

Available from your local bookseller, or directly from:



Batsford 4 Fitzhardinge Street, London W1H 0AH Telephone: 01-486 8484



Sight and Sound Binders

Each binder holds 2 years supply and is covered in blue Balacron with gold lettering
Price £4.00, £5.25 including p. & p. (\$10.50)



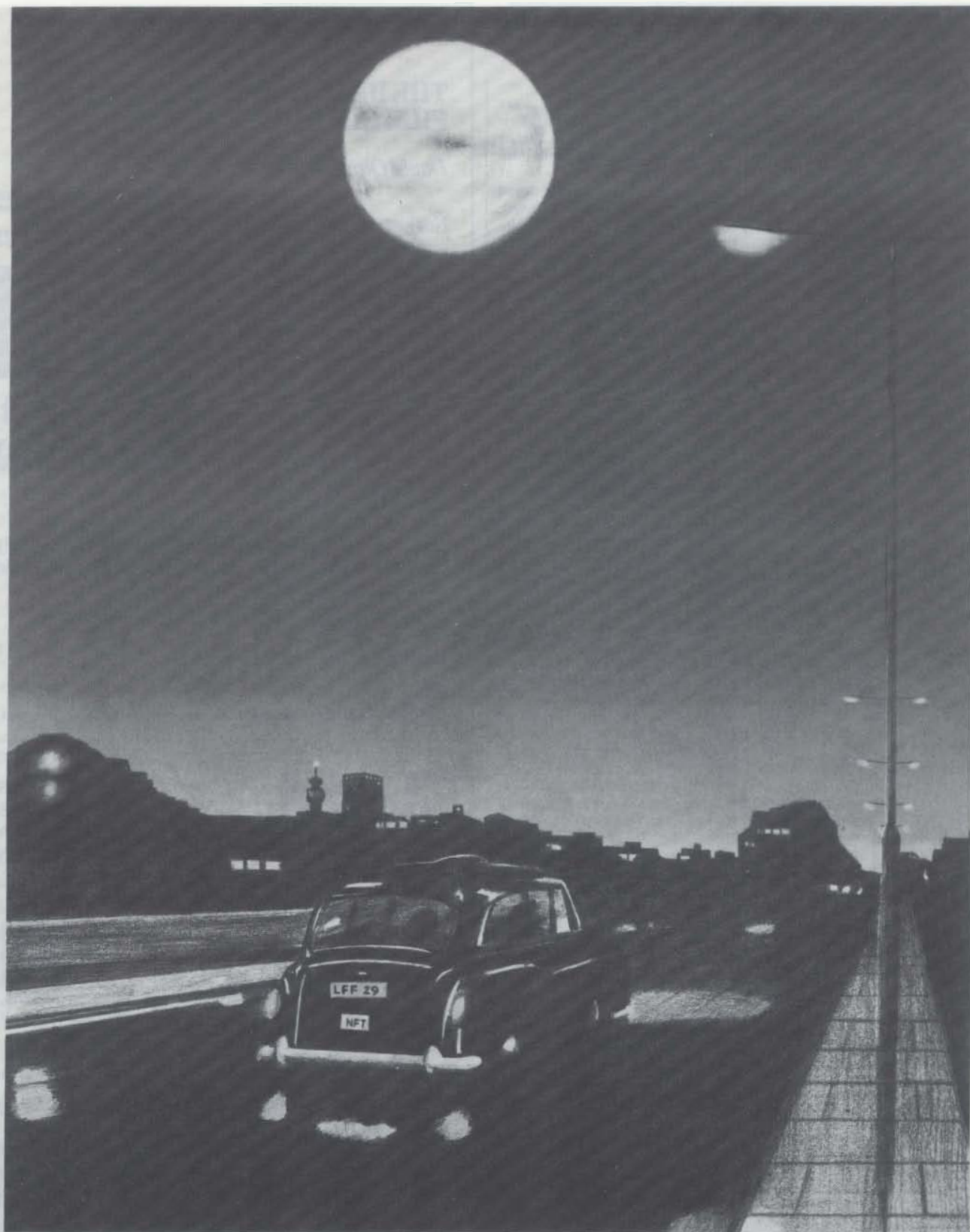
British Film Institute, Publications and Membership Services, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA

contacts

Cinema Bookshop

24, RUE DU COLISÉE 75008 PARIS

TÉL. (1) 359.17.71



Design & Illustration by Robert Barnes © National Film Theatre 1985

29TH LONDON FILM FESTIVAL

14 November - 1 December 1985

National Film Theatre, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1 8XT

Box Office: 01 928 3232

GLC
funded

bfi

THE BEST PLACE TO SEE A FILM? WALLY OLINS

Wally Olins is the chairman of Wolff Olins, designers of the Screen on the Hill cinema in London.

Old place: The Empire Leicester Square in the early 1930s, with a queue for *Trader Horn*.



Films are a funny old business. Film people are never happier than when they are grinding on about their own misfortunes. There's always something wrong. Either brilliant film-makers are stifled because nobody will give them any money. Or, less often, there's so much money around that films get out of touch—like opera. Or video is seeing the end of the film business as we know it. Or the two major companies in the field in Britain have, by their very presence, strangled real initiative—or something.

In this world of melancholic self-absorption, no subject gets more of an airing than the decline of the cinema-going audience. Since the drift away from the cinema has been going on for about thirty years now, there has been ample opportunity to find culprits. Over the last generation or so, everything you can think of has been blamed.

● First it was the arrival of black and white television. Who wants to go to the cinema when they can see television at home?

● Then it was colour television. Who wants to go to the cinema when they can see colour television at home?

● Then it was comfort. Who wants to sit in an uncomfortable cinema when homes have become much more comfortable?

● Then it was the price. Who wants to pay to see a film when they can see television at home free?

● Then it was what the trade calls the product. Films are not what they used to be. Nobody wants to see them.

● Then it was the arrival of video. Films are very good, everybody wants to see them, but they can see them at home, can't they?

In all this noisy, repetitive tumult some of us have consistently said that the main thing that's wrong is very simple. It's the cinemas. People don't want to go to cinemas because most

cinemas are no longer pleasant places to visit, and they haven't been for a very long time. Cinemas are, for the most part, we said, nasty, dirty, grimy, smelly and miserable places in which to spend an evening. Some of them are even violent.

The degree of decline, the lack of investment, the wholesale neglect, can only clearly be appreciated by an analogy with another trade. If most of the restaurants in this country were built in the 1930s, had hardly been touched since then, except for minor, shoddy alterations and were monopolised, let us say, by Grand Met and Trust House Forte, what state would the restaurant business be in today? It would probably be as rundown, dreary and generally unprofitable as the cinema business.

However, mercifully, things in the eating-out trade are not like that. What we see in the restaurant business is immense variety, imagination, competition and vitality; theme restaurants, ethnic restaurants, small chains, large chains all fight with each other. In every conceivable market segment there is an exciting eating-out possibility. When Wimpy open up a market and then allow their standards to decline, McDonald's come in and revolutionise that segment of the trade. They're followed by Burger King, Wendy's and others, and Wimpy, in order to survive, has to make large investments in staff training, in product quality and in design and maintenance.

At absolutely the other end of the market, when Wheeler's go into decline, Green's Champagne and Oyster Bar shines. The restaurant business is vital, lively, imaginative and highly competitive. It is also highly profitable for those who can take the pace.

All this is as unlike the cinema business as it is possible to be—except in one respect. Both businesses are about leisure and entertainment. In fact the entertainment and leisure business is booming. All over the world it is one of the fastest growing businesses. So, if we want to look for a way of making the cinema industry work, we have got to examine why it isn't working now, because in principle it ought to be.

On the other hand, so many people have, for so long, assumed that cinemas can't be made profitable that those of us who think otherwise had better examine the situation before jumping to any conclusions. To see what is wrong, we have to look carefully at the structure of the industry—and that means the two biggies.

I don't particularly want to attack Rank and Thorn EMI, because they are such easy targets that it isn't really fair, and above all, it doesn't help. But with the best will in the world, it's only possible to say that their record in the cinema business is far from glorious.

Both companies have strengths, for example, in technology and certain aspects of retail distribution, both have done well in some fields. Rank has, over the years, been energetic, imaginative and highly successful with Xerox, for



New place: The Screen on the Hill.

instance, but both seem to be completely at sea with cinemas. When it comes to dealing with the cinema business, they don't seem to know what to do, or how to do it, and so, like most people who are uncomfortable in a given situation, they prefer to forget about it.

Of course, both companies have excuses: they have enormous calls upon their relatively restricted financial resources and both have taken the view, perhaps correctly, that there are lots of businesses in which in the longer term they have more chance of getting a better return for a given investment than in cinemas.

In the nature of things, then, the cinema part of their business has for years been treated like a graveyard. The cinema business in each company was left to traditional cinema people. The people who were left in charge were told that what they had to do—with minimum investment—was to try to stem the bleeding away of audiences. They were decent, if unimaginative folk, and they did the best they could, according to their own lights, with the pitiful amount of money they were given. They carved cinemas up into doubles and triples. Sometimes they put up the prices; they sold sweets, ice-creams, hot dogs, popcorn, anything they could get their hands on. They took in as much screen advertising as they could, they crossed their fingers, shut their eyes and hoped for the best. And the audiences continued to melt away.

It was in the nature of these traditional guardians of the cinema exhibition business in its darkest days that they did not want to listen to

outside advice. They were, it is true, hampered and cramped. They hadn't got much room to manoeuvre within their own companies, but it must also be said that they really didn't want to know. Anybody who presented new ideas to them got pretty short shrift. New ideas were threatening and involved risk. They preferred to die with a whimper rather than a bang. Bravery, flair and imagination were in short supply. The revolution in the customs, habits and tastes of the British people which took place between the 60s and 80s completely passed them by. They remained pickled in aspic with Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe, somewhere in 1961. British cinemas somehow got stuck in some monstrous time-warped.

Look at what the traditionalists did to the cinemas that have been refurbished—let's ignore all those hideously chopped up conversions, done on the cheap, full of leaking sound systems and out-of-focus equipment. Let's look at the ones that are supposed to have been properly done. One of the very latest on the list, the pride of the ABC fleet, is Fulham Road. Well, it's certainly cleaner and tidier than it was, but what an opportunity lost. When Britain is teeming with highly successful design companies who have made brilliant successes in the retail marketplace, what has been done with the ABC Fulham Road? Putting it kindly, the answer is not much. It's the old recipe just slightly warmed over.

There were, of course, various courageous attempts by imaginative independents to change things. A few cinemas run by independents were

imaginative and successful—but these were the exceptions.

I suppose things have begun to change in the last couple of years, even perhaps in the last few months. The renaissance of the British film industry has led to the revival of interest in the cinema, and a modest but none the less not entirely negligible rise in audiences, or at least a decline in the decline. But the fact of the matter remains that the structure of the industry, dominated as it was, and still is, by the two majors, has profoundly inhibited its growth—and we should not really expect too much from Rank or Thorn EMI.

In other countries where there has been more initiative and less domination from one or two major sources, things have been different. In France and the United States, where it's perhaps worth noting that large sums of money have been spent on the refurbishment and design of the cinema itself for many years, audiences are relatively big, and the business is becoming quite prosperous. Cinemas are pleasant, they vary in size, they look and feel like the real world.

Success abroad, combined with increasing interest at home, has made the British cinema industry just a touch more optimistic, and we are now entering a phase where there appears to be the beginnings of some kind of change. We are hearing about new investment in entertainment centres, of which the Milton Keynes example is the most widely publicised. The new formula seems to be that if you have a multi-screen complex in the right location, with appropriate car parking facilities, you may be able to attract more people back to the cinema.

All this is a bit tentative and hedged in by all kinds of qualifications. It's also very heavily surrounded by pseudo marketing jargon. There's a lot of talk about socio-economic groups, A, B, C1's and similar gobbledegook. And from time to time we even hear that dreary, much-abused word 'lifestyle' dredged up once again. The only word we don't hear

much is 'imagination', and that's the one thing the cinema really needs if it's going to become a viable and profitable form of entertainment. Even now there's something narrow and claustrophobic about the so-called cinema revival. The cinema has its own culture, its own language and its own values. Perhaps without entirely realising it, it harks back to the days when it dominated the world of leisure and entertainment. Today, the cinema is only a small part of that world and, like a shrunken Britain coming face to face with its post-imperial reality, the cinema also has to readjust its attitudes and start to look around it.

The cinema should examine what's going on in the High Street, in restaurants, supermarkets, and above all, in other parts of the entertainment and leisure business where there has never been so much imagination, style and flair displayed as there is now.

Funnily enough, in its early days, the cinema was the major repository of flair and imagination of the popular world. It was run almost entirely on flair and imagination. Oscar Deutsch of the Odeon chain, the Bernstein family and all the other tycoons didn't need any research to tell them that people wanted glamour and excitement from the cinemas. So they built real picture palaces.

I can remember as a child—a very small child—being taken to the Astoria at Finsbury Park. It had fountains in the foyer and stars twinkling in the sky in the auditorium, and the sight quite literally took my breath away. I had never seen anything so wonderful. Well, of course we all know that times have changed, that children are much more sophisticated, and grown-ups too for that matter, but the basic human needs for fun, for excitement, for comfort, for reassurance, for wonder, haven't changed one iota, and there still seems to be a desperate shortage of them.

Of course I'm not arguing with the multi-screen complexes. Like everybody else who cares about the industry I want

Milton Keynes and others like it to be a great success, but I think it's linear to believe that this is the only formula. There are so many ways to make the cinema a success.

We could have small, boutiquey art cinemas, designed to a low budget, like the Screen on the Hill, which Wolff Olins designed; we could have multi-screen houses; we could have cine-bars seating as few as fifty people; we could have repertory houses; we could screen the film on to the street, so that passers-by could see the action; we could have entertainment palaces in which multi-screen complexes played a part. The permutations really are almost endless, there is room for everything and everybody.

I'm a bit frightened that what we are being dished up will be a bit sterile and unimaginative. There is room in the High Street for Next and Top Shop, Habitat and Way In—they are all different, they are all successful, they are all to do with today's fashions and aspirations.

Putting all this on one side—there is another factor that the new cinema has to take into account. Cinemas are part of the service industry. And nowadays we know a lot about how to manage service businesses. The cinema needs to examine successful service business concepts in order to succeed. In any service business there are four interrelated factors which, if the balance is right, produce success. They are a mix of product, environment, communication and behaviour.

● First, product: the main reason why people go to the cinema is to see a film. Audiences vary, so do films. A prime requirement is to match the film to the audience. This means taking real notice of the age-group of the audience, where it lives, how much money it's got and what it enjoys, and then matching them up.

If the match is right, a lot more can be done to attract people to the idea of going to cinemas regularly. Experiments should be undertaken to see if it's

Changing place. Left: the Curzon, Mayfair, which opened in 1934. Right: the 1966 cinema.



possible to build up a regular audience through consistent repertory seasons. The whole question of making seat bookings for, say, an eight-week season should be examined; isn't it remarkable that Ed Mervish at the Old Vic is doing this, and the cinema, with a few honourable exceptions, hasn't even got around to it yet. In a multi-screen complex, some auditoria should be reserved for specific kinds of films, so that a rep audience could begin to build up the idea of a permanent relationship.

● So much for the product. What about the environment? However much people may like a film, they will stay away if they don't like the place it's being shown in. Cinemas must be made attractive, lively places which actually work. In simple terms, regardless of size, design and location, the cinema must be properly maintained—that is, thoroughly cleaned after each performance, the seats must be comfortable, it must be neither too warm nor too cold. In other words, the cinema must have ordinary, decent amenities.

● The third factor is communication. If people don't know what's on, what time the programme starts and finishes, if they can't book in advance, use a credit card if they feel like it—in other words, if the cinema is not truly accessible—people will turn away.

While we're on the subject, what about the length of the programme? The argument that the cinema has a duty to

show shorts, on the basis that it's the only way apprentices can learn, is about as valid as suggesting that people with tooth problems should spend at least part of their time with an apprentice dentist. It's nonsense.

● The final and perhaps most important element in a service business is motivation. If the film is right, the design of the cinema is right and the communication is right, the service business will still foul up if the people who run it are not properly motivated.

In service businesses it is a truism that people matter. British Airways has improved because the stewardesses are no longer surly and the planes run on time, more or less. McDonald's is a success not so much because the hamburgers taste better, but because the people who work in a McDonald's restaurant are carefully trained and effectively motivated. If you can motivate someone to sell hamburgers and clear up dirty tables, you can motivate them to run a cinema.

A lot of people still love the cinema. Many men and women, given the slightest chance, and an opportunity to earn a good living, would be prepared to devote their careers to the cinema business. They need to be trained properly in the use of all the techniques that are today so familiar in service businesses, and motivated by respect and decent salaries to do a proper job.

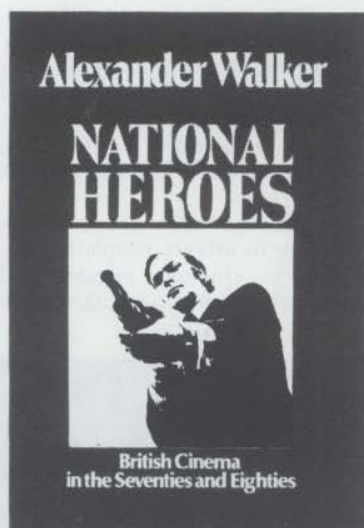
If the big organisations can't run

cinemas successfully, why don't they consider franchising? In some respects the cinema seems to represent an ideal opportunity for the franchise business.

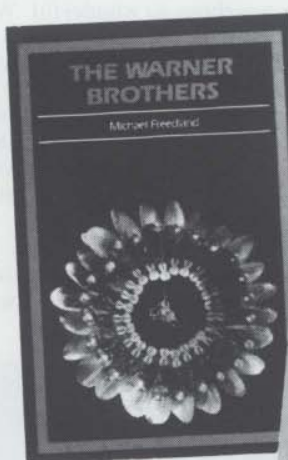
Franchising is a proven concept in the leisure and entertainment business; many highly successful businesses have been built up on it. The whole franchising business is, in principle, very well suited to the cinema. It demands a certain amount of capital, well-thought through, carefully monitored systems, a standard product and tight disciplines. Above all, it depends on highly motivated franchisees. All this is either available now, or could with relative ease be created.

But this brings us back to imagination again. The cinema business has a first-class product. It needs imagination, not only in its design and its communication, but also in its commercial attitudes. Franchising is imaginative, it challenges received ideas, and it would certainly meet with opposition. It's so much easier to be negative than positive. What with the weight of industry's traditions, I can't see it making much headway, even though it has real potential.

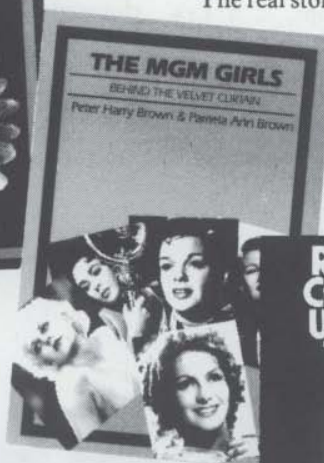
To make the business work properly, the cinema needs what every service business needs; the right product in the right environment at a competitive price, clearly communicated, and managed by highly motivated people. This is the formula for a really successful, profitable, enjoyable business. Who's going to give it a whirl? ■



Sequel to Alexander Walker's original study of the British film industry, *Hollywood, England*. As well as examining new developments in the industry and portraying many of its leading figures, there is also a yearly 'diary' chronicling events and detailing every British film premiered each year. Illustrated with photographs. **£10.95**



An absorbing biography of the Warner Brothers who, for two generations, dictated the movie-going habits of people the world over. Fully illustrated. **£5.95 (pb)**



The real story about the glamorous movie queens — those who were destroyed by the system and those who survived. Fully illustrated. **£5.95 (pb)**

Recently discovered in the Universal studio archives, and never realised as a film, is a brilliant screenplay by Raymond Chandler which has all the hallmarks of a classic Chandler thriller. **£8.95**



HARRAP

Now available from all good booksellers

PERRY in Nineteen Eighty-Five



Nineteen Eighty-Four: (back, from left) Michael Radford, Simon Perry, (front) Richard Burton, Suzanna Hamilton and John Hurt.

Simon Perry, this year's chairman of the Association of Independent Producers and, as he says in the following interview, longtime flag-waver for 'films of cultural integrity made in Britain', has spent much of 1985—British Film Year—setting up two independent features to be shot in Paris

and in Lorraine. Documentarist Jana Bokova's first feature, the farce *Hôtel du Paradis*, awaits the commitment of its last investor; ready to go in October, however, is *Nanou*, a romance with a political background, written and directed by Conny Templeman. Here, Simon Perry reflects on the aftermath

of the acclaimed and now profit-making *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which he produced for his company Umbrella Films, and the reasons for his prospective foray into the French film industry. He also reports on the lessons of co-owning a 500-seat Norfolk cinema, the Regal, Cromer.

SIMON PERRY: I had dinner with David Puttnam while we were cutting *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He remarked, 'How are you? Been riding the tiger?' I had not heard the expression before, but it seemed accurate. This year does, decidedly, have a post-holocaust feel. The effort required to finish the film in

1984 was considerable; however, it is still playing round the world, its reputation is still strong. People have, I believe, now separated the title from the date. The one country where we were not committed to open in 1984 was Japan. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* played recently at the Tokyo festival, where the details of

some of the nude scenes caused a stir: we showed things never previously seen on a public screen in Japan. It was extremely well liked.

Keith Turner of Virgin Films, our backer, was responsible for the film's presales. These started at Cannes 84, in the middle of shooting, and by the end of

August most of Europe was sold. Our opening dates for almost every continent except North America were carved in stone before we had finished the picture. I had absolute confidence that Mike Radford, the director, could finish the film, and finish it well, but my one moment of real anxiety was when he and Tom Priestley, the editor, said they thought they could not make the delivery date. You normally have plenty of time for foreign-language versions, but not with this film. I was making the trailers during the editing: I'd put a scene in the trailer and it would be cut from the film.

The territories where *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has not yet been sold are not worth a great deal, financially. We have not sold to a single Eastern Bloc country or to China. The East and West African rights have gone to a distributor, though I cannot say whether it has actually opened. We have covered South America, though Brazil was outstanding before we had finished the picture (Keith Turner went on to place the film, as we anticipated, after the Rio festival). It has opened in a number of Latin American territories, notably Venezuela where it was bigger than *Ghostbusters*, equalled only by *Flashdance*.

Are there drawbacks to the label 'Producer of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'? Can you still watch the film, and indeed your other pictures, *Another Time*, *Another Place* and *Loose Connections*?

I have a tremendous affection for the first two films I produced for Umbrella, and I always like to watch them, particularly with different audiences. I watched *Loose Connections* recently, which I had not seen for a few months, with a French festival audience: very illuminating, they loved it. Phyllis Logan I can always watch. I have a problem with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, though I do not want to make too much of this, because, specifically, the music was changed. It's a film that, at the moment at any rate, I don't choose to watch. It is just really too painful. That said, it is a film I am very proud of: Mike Radford did a remarkable job, particularly against the clock. I feel, too, that at the end of the day it was extremely good value. It has been much publicised that it went over budget: it did go over, though not as much as has been claimed—but that was because of the time pressure. It is the only film I have produced which has gone over budget. I am told, incidentally, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, as they say, 'out', in profit.

It was an extremely happy film with the added excitement of knowing that we *had* to make a definitive version, that the chance would not come again. I am glad, though, that we stopped making it after a time.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* established you in ways that Mike Radford's previous film, the very well received *Another Time*, *Another Place*, did not. Did you plan to capitalise on this? Did you plan another film in Britain, or were you**

already committed to the Franco-British co-productions?

I really did not think about anything until the very end of 1984. I had, however, a commitment to Conny Templeman's *Nanou* (its working title). We had both been living with it for three years. I was waiting for her to finish her time at the National Film School, she for me to finish *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The two were going to coincide, and her film seemed a good change of pace. What a film costs does not make an enormous amount of difference, it is what you have to put into it. A feature is a year out of your life. Mike Radford is working on two scripts, one of which we will do together: at the moment, however, we are just coasting. I have to keep working though, because, despite the scale of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we actually made very little money out of it. I could not take a year off developing projects. After *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I thought: I'll just have to find the rest of the money for Conny's film.

Then Jana Bokova, whom I knew, came through the door and besought me to produce *Hôtel du Paradis* which for a long time, with various producers, she has been trying to get off the ground. Like *Nanou*, it is set in France, and I quickly decided to try to make them back to back. The alternative would have been to pursue another big film, or an American film, to have maintained the scale. Discussions were had. But since I have felt for several years that Europe is neglected by British filmmakers, both as a market and as a place to make films and set stories, I opted to spend 1985 being as much a French producer as a British one.

How did the French take to you? Did they have expectations?

When I went to France in December, I discovered that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had gathered a reputation within the French film industry and that I was part of that reputation, which did me no harm. One thing they liked was that the

film seemed to owe nothing to television and nothing to the American cinema. They were intrigued that the producer (and the French, remember, see the producer as the man who provides, rather than raises, the money) was not interested in going to America and making enormous-budget films, as it seemed to them he must have the opportunity to do, but wanted to work in Europe on small-scale projects with two new directors, neither of whom had made films in France and both of whom happened to be women. It was a bizarre, copy-worthy package.

My proposal was greeted with interest, and particularly because I wanted to investigate co-ventures, which are, of course, what Jack Lang and the French Ministry of Culture are anxious to promote.

Had a French film-maker set out to shoot *Nanou*, what do you think would have been his approach? Would he have raised the money more readily?

He would have found it easier to raise the French money, unquestionably. But he could never have raised the English money. *Nanou* is about an English girl who spends a year in France living with a Frenchman. There is a strong social setting, a small town in the northeast, and also quite an important political background. The French writer-director would, I am sure, have told the story from the point of view of the man, the town, the region, the politics. Conny Templeman has told the story entirely from the girl's point of view. That to me is its strength. It's a love story, a film of emotions not of politics, and that's what will make it attractive to Anglo-Saxon audiences.

As a French film, it would have been very different. This was not exactly debilitating, but it did make raising the money a slow process. We always knew the script needed a good deal of input from the French. The story is not exactly autobiographical, but it is set in a part of France which Conny Templeman knows

Conny Templeman, writer-director of *Nanou*.



well. However, she was the first to admit that, for example, she could not fill out the supporting characters as authentically as a French writer. My French co-producer, Patrick Sandrin, therefore introduced us to the co-writer, Antoine Lacomblez. (They had previously worked together on *Oriane*, the Franco-Venezuelan film which won the Camera d'Or at Cannes this year.)

Nanou will be shot in a mixture of French and English: people will speak whatever seems natural. Although the girl learns French rather quickly on arrival, I suspect that most of the sequences between our main couple will be in English. There will be four versions: a French one with the English sections subtitled; an English one with the French bits subtitled; a French tv version dubbed throughout; and, providing it is strong enough in any Anglo-Saxon market, a version which is all-English with the French bits dubbed.

I have come to several conclusions about this language problem, which is absolutely central to the notion of European film-making. I have no easy solution, but I do believe that subtitling confines the film to an audience which can and is prepared to read subtitles. It is not just a question of habituation, one must think about the audience which doesn't read fast (and no condescension is implied here). I believe dubbing is the answer. You make a face, but we in Britain have a resistance to dubbing because we believe it's cheap and on the whole badly done. One thinks of Italian films with the actors saying 'One, two, three' and those repeated shots of backs of heads.

I always instinctively felt that until I saw the German version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. They took the trouble to match the timbre of John Hurt's voice; and the man who *always* did Richard Burton (now, presumably, out of a job) was faultless. My disbelief was suspended. I could not believe that we had not shot the film in German. The French version was of a similar standard,

though it must be said I have not seen the Italian or Spanish or any other language versions. Now this may partly be because English speakers lend themselves to dubbing, they tend not to articulate or use their mouths a great deal. At the same time, to underline another well-known fact, I do believe that the cinema is primarily a visual medium. The words, in a sense, come second.

British scriptwriters seriously confronting the idea of European film-making will have to realise that their work will, as part of the production process, be dubbed immediately into six languages. The wash-back effect will be less verbiage: the scripts I read are full of verbiage, the English disease. So that must be a benefit. This is not to say plainspoken, unnuanced, unambiguous dialogue will prevail, but that spoken words will be made to count. Scriptwriters will try harder to do more with the visual elements of a scene. There is nothing quite so dispiriting as the heavy-footed, over-articulated movement of plot: images that ponderously illustrate rather than illuminate. We need reminding of the speed with which cinema can advance a plot, and dubbing, ironically, might just help us.

Dubbing of course has its disadvantages. It will, up to a point, remove essential, enjoyable cultural differences. But culture is not just language: indeed, I would say that it's predominantly visual and behavioural. To me, dubbing is just a convention that we have to learn to accept, like opera. The gains, I am sure, are greater than the losses. It would be of immense benefit if more French and Italian films, by virtue of being dubbed, were seen by English audiences. Horizons would be opened.

Should British film-makers in British Film Year be looking across the Channel?

I did not go to France because it was easier for me to find the money there than in England; in fact it was harder. I

went because I had two projects which were set in France. I did not want, in good old Anglo-Saxon style, to impose Anglo-Saxon money and methods on the French and make them as English films shot abroad. Integration was important to us. I wanted to make them from inside the French industry; and they are being shot as French films, although they will be cut here. At the moment I'm immersing myself in the French industry; I have equal bases in both countries. Foreign money is an attraction, but it should not dictate the project. If it does, as bitter experience teaches, one begins to lose control, to make a hybrid picture which will satisfy no one.

I was a founder member of the Association of Independent Producers and I am a great flag-waver for films of cultural integrity made in Britain, but it would be a dull world if all British films were made in Britain. The AIP initiative to boost British film-making was born of a resistance to the Americans. It seemed to us, and it still seems to me, that the Americans make American films far better than we do. Britain has suffered from being a Hollywood annex and the tendency among British film-makers has been to think of cinema as an American medium and to struggle to emulate what is essentially a foreign culture. Many have fallen into the Atlantic trying to do that. The key is that people must make films which they feel from the inside. I am *not* arguing: Europe much more interesting than America. For one thing, let it be said that there is far less money in Europe than people who talk vaguely about European movies understand.

Movies in Europe are generally made to a much lower price structure than they are in Britain. Patrick Sandrin's hunch is that he would expect to see *Nanou* budgeted at 7-8m francs, which is about £650-700,000. The French budget differently, they do not include things we would: the producer always gives the completion guarantee, while we are having to find one from an independent insurer; the music is never a feature of a French budget... Nevertheless, we have a budget of £1m for *Nanou* and it seems to the French very high. It is high partly because it's an Anglo-French picture; there is travelling, hotel bills, etc. But then there is a £50,000 completion guarantee which would not appear on a French budget.

After *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I wanted to do something more than simply make another film. I wanted to develop a presence in another cinema, another industry. At least to test it and see if it was interesting. I believe that is part of a producer's responsibility, to be aware of the markets of the world, intimately. If your point of departure is that 'most big successful films are English-language', that is simply another way of falling into the American trap. I take pleasure in the abrasion of cultures. *Another Time, Another Place* is about Italians in Scotland, *Loose Connections* about Britons in Germany, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not quite fit, but it is about

Loose Connections (1983).



human beings in a completely unreal culture. Jana Bokova's film is about an East European actor obliged to work most of his life in small parts in the Anglo-Saxon world, coming to France as a possible haven to make a comeback in *café théâtre*; and *Nanou* is about an English girl in a French village...

What made you buy a cinema in Norfolk? Was it to find out more about the market, the last stage of the game?

It was pure instinct. It was a bit like Everest: I climbed it because it was there. I met my partner Alastair Gregory through the AIP. He mentioned there was a cinema in the town next to the village where his parents lived that had just closed. I took an interest because I once worked for Anglia Television and knew Cromer. The cinema had not failed, but it had been owned by a company with other cinemas which had. The company went to the wall and the Regal Cromer was in the hands of the receiver. A particular attraction was that it was not subject to barring restrictions.

The mix was right. It also seemed an opportunity to test some theories, because we producers spend a lot of time complaining about distributors and exhibitors. It is a 500-seater, which is too big. We are going to reduce the number of seats, and use the space liberated for a restaurant, bar and bookshop, a conference room and video facilities. We shall raise the money, locally I hope and probably under the Business Expansion Scheme. I am keen that we should not be regarded as the townies from London (although, like Alastair Gregory, I have family connections with the area), and we are working to establish a presence, getting to know the audience.

In our catchment area there are between 50,000 and 80,000 people, and, speaking as an exhibitor, I think it true to say that there is still a desire to go to the cinema. The habit has largely gone, but the desire is still there, tempered though it is by extreme caution. We opened on 19 April with *A Passage to India* (I asked for a print as a favour from John Brabourne and Richard Goodwin, and Bob Webster of EMI film distributors) and we did sensational business. We have, on the other hand, had bad weeks: American movies without much presence don't go. *The Shooting Party*, very good; *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I'm pleased to say, very good. *Loose Connections* has just been on television, so we shall have to wait a while. One small consideration is that our strip of the Norfolk coast cannot receive Channel 4: so they have not yet seen *Another Time, Another Place*.

I believe strongly in programming for children, and we have an arrangement with the local chamber of commerce which is to underwrite any losses on the first eight weeks of our Saturday matinees. Children are tomorrow's audience, and if we cannot appeal to them, we might as well pack up. We caught a very bad cold with *Places in*



Simon Perry in Cromer.

the Heart, which was a film our audiences might have enjoyed if they had been aware of it. It died; we covered our costs—but we have to do better than that. Another film which did disappointingly was *2010*. You might have thought the young would have turned out for a space epic. Not a bit. It had no particular point of attraction. The audience had not read about it (and at the time our publicity was not in gear); and *2001* was a 60s cult movie which you fool yourself if you believe everyone remembers. We have forborne from booking *Morons from Outer Space*. We could have done all right with it, but it will keep: Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones are going to go on being tv famous. Normally, however, we like films very quickly, providing we can secure the prints. We like to be up the week after Norwich.

If there is one thing I wish about British Film Year it is that it had concentrated totally and absolutely on

promoting cinema exhibition. I think the slogan was right—'Cinema, the Best Place to See a Film'—but I was disappointed to see that on the big float in Leicester Square the films were being shown on video screens. A shocking, major mistake. The £1m a month on cinema improvements, if cleverly used, is not an unreasonable sum. The Cannon Classic chain, I think, are refurbishing their cinemas admirably. But much more than refurbishment is needed. People have got to have many more reasons for coming to a cinema than simply to see a film. It has been said before, but is worth saying again: you have to provide somewhere where they can eat and drink, buy books and records, buy presents. The multiplex notion is great, but I don't see any reason why a single hall should not work.

If I have another general feeling, reinforced by my experiences at Cromer, it is that if one simply identifies the cinema audience as 16 to 24 and lower-middle and working class one is neglecting a very large audience. We feel we must cater for the audience which supports provincial repertory theatres. In Norwich there is the shining example of Dick Condon. Dick Condon is an extraordinarily able Irish impresario who has built the Theatre Royal into a profit-making, unsubsidised theatre which caters, absolutely, for the community. He remembers names, talks to people in the restaurant, changes their meals if they are unhappy, gives them free tickets if they don't like the show. That sort of style—very middle class—can be transmitted to the cinema; and if successful, will bring in and hold a new audience. The London art houses do it a little, some do have motivated managers. But this is where the chains are up against it: there is much to be said for a franchise system where the manager has local responsibility.

JOHN PYM

Eclipse, directed by Simon Perry in 1976.





The British Film Institute and the University of Illinois Press are pleased to announce that BFI Publishing's books are now available in the USA and Canada from the University of Illinois Press.

'The BFI seems to be almost alone in producing the intelligent books about television that the importance of the medium demands.'

THE BOOKSELLER

FRAMING SCIENCE: The Making of a BBC Documentary

By Roger Silverstone

Science now affects all our lives, and television is for most of us the principal means by which we understand its benefits and dangers. Yet science documentaries are first and foremost television programmes and not scientific reports. Roger Silverstone follows the making of a BBC *Horizon* programme to establish how far programme-makers are influenced by the demands of television and the need to appeal to a wide non-specialist audience, rather than by purely scientific considerations.

Hardback/paperback/250pp

'A fascinating account of the making of a documentary film'
Aubrey Singer *The Listener*

MTM: 'Quality Television'

Edited by Jane Feuer, Paul Kerr and Tise Vahimagi

One of the most innovative companies in American television, MTM's success is based on series such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Lou Grant* and *Hill Street Blues*.

Hardback/paperback/308pp

'I was absolutely bowled over by the book *MTM: 'Quality Television'*. It gave me instant and accurate recall of all the valued associates, the shows that worked, the stupid mistakes, the painful disappointments and, most of all, the myriad marvellous moments that were the bulk of the MTM experience. The depth and detail of the research is simply awesome.'

Grant A. Tinker, *Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer, NBC*



'Some of the most interesting writing on American cinema is being published not in the U.S. but through the British Film Institute.'

VELVET LIGHT TRAP

BRITISH CINEMA NOW

Edited by Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick

The well informed and lively essays in this book offer both the facts and analysis necessary to understand the acute problems facing the British film industry. Does the success of films like *Chariots of Fire* and *The Killing Fields* indicate a genuine renaissance or another false dawn? *British Cinema Now* is essential reading for anyone concerned about the future of British cinema.

Hardback/paperback/160pp

'An excellent collection of essays'

City Limits



EXPORTING ENTERTAINMENT: America in the World Film Market 1907-1933

By Kristin Thompson

During World War I, while the energies of the European powers were directed elsewhere, the American film industry achieved a dominance in the world market which it has never lost. This book assembles a mass of information from previously unexplored sources to show how and why Hollywood has become practically synonymous with popular cinema.

Hardback/256pp

CINEMA AND STATE: The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84

By Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street

Based on new research, *Cinema and State* is a history of government intervention in the British film industry during the last six decades. By the 1920s, American domination of the British film industry was so complete that the British government was forced to intervene directly in order to prevent a total collapse in film production. Since then, as one crisis has succeeded another, the question of what the government should do has always been at the centre of plans to rejuvenate the industry.

Hardback/paperback/280pp



A NEW DEAL IN ENTERTAINMENT: Warner Brothers in the 1930s

By Nick Roddick

Warner Brothers, more than any other studio, reflected the immense changes in American society during the 1930s. It was the period of the Depression, Roosevelt's New Deal, economic recovery and political isolationism. It was also the heyday of the Hollywood studio. Nick Roddick examines the Warners studio and the films it produced to provide a detailed account of a film studio that was both typical and extraordinary.

Hardback/paperback/332pp

'The best history of Warner Brothers ever written'
Journal of American History

'The industry's problems emerge with crystal clarity'
Times Higher Education Supplement



A complete catalogue of all BFI Publishing's books can be obtained by writing to: **USA and Canada:** University of Illinois Press: 54E Gregory Drive, Champaign, Illinois 61820, USA. **Australia:** Wild & Woolley Pty Ltd., PO Box 41, Glebe, NSW 2037, Australia. **BFI Publishing:** British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA, England.

NICK RODDICK

STRENGTH!

A Beginner's Guide to Australian Television

There are two things any first-time visitor to a country should do: head for the nearest supermarket, and switch on the first available television. Forget the guided tours and the tourist shops: Hong Kong and Taiwan have had the world souvenir market sewn up for ages, and all those unique, hand-crafted ash-trays with their pictures of Brighton Pavilion, Grand Canyon or the Sydney Harbour Bridge were probably painted in the same Far Eastern sweatshop. Above all, forget the local cinemas: they'll be showing *Indiana Jones* dubbed and, in any case, buying a ticket will require a command of the local language and currency that you probably haven't yet acquired.

When you get to a new country, it helps to be anonymous for a while; and, in that respect, supermarkets and television are ideal. TVs don't talk back, and it doesn't matter if you look lost in a supermarket, because everybody does. Supermarkets are also ruthlessly efficient at revealing what people really eat, as opposed to what they want you to think they eat. Any trip to a French supermarket, for example, will reveal that the French gorge themselves on junk food to an extent that would disgust even a South London teenager.

But supermarkets supply only secondary characteristics: for the inner person, you need television. You can find out everything about a country in much the same way Fleming found out about penicillin: by mistake. Television comes under the only definition of culture I have ever really trusted: the sort that grows on old cheese. At the same time, television is also the cash nexus expressed as culture. As a result, it can produce great art, major social advances, demeaning garbage and mindless drivel in equal measure and with scarcely a break between them. As Raymond Williams abruptly discovered, jet-lagged and dozing in a Florida hotel at three o'clock in the morning, television isn't programmes—it's an unbroken flow, in which soap opera and sport, game shows and news reports merge into one. But they merge in different ways in different countries.

If there is one myth about Britain which has proved more tenacious than almost any other, it is that we have the



A Country Practice: Matron Sloan and Sister Loveday.

best television in the world. I used to teach visiting American students who would step off the plane with that myth embedded in their minds. An evening's primetime viewing was generally enough to disabuse them: *George and Mildred* proved a great leveller. In reality, British television is the same mixture of the agreeable and the awful, the almost great and the decidedly tacky, as the television of any other nation. It is also, unmistakably and irretrievably, British—which is, of course, why we think it's so wonderful.

Brief contact with foreign television systems can be quite perplexing. Why is there so much singing on Mexican tele-

vision? What is it about Thursdays in Iceland to make Icelandic TV stop altogether? Do Dutch children learn to read more quickly because so many of their primetime programmes are subtitled? Can it have helped the current situation in New Caledonia that local television seems to be made up almost entirely of videotapes sent from France, linked by a very non-Kanak-looking person sitting in front of a hibiscus?

But of those various television systems I have had, at best, a couple of weeks' experience. Australia's I have been voyeuristically in love with for six months—long enough to convince me that, along with Bugs Bunny and rock 'n'

roll, it is one of the true marvels of twentieth century culture. It is a unique combination of BBC-style public service broadcasting and us-style commercial ratings wars. And it is currently in a state of some flux. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation—the public service bit—is under sustained attack from the Hawke government, whether for overspending or simply because it is there is not entirely clear. And even the three big commercial networks are busy rationalising: the Seven Network, owned by the Fairfax Group, which has major newspaper interests as well; the National Nine Network, fief of Consolidated Press Holdings, known to its friends as Kerry Packer; and the Ten Network, owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd, in which all sorts of interesting corporate things are now going on so that Mr Murdoch, who is about to become an American citizen, can hold on to his Australian media empire.

The commercial networks are already talking about axing shows whose ratings are strong, in favour of more cost-efficient programmes—quizzes and game shows, in other words, which rate highly but don't cost so much to produce. *It's a Knockout!* has just been imported, to general audience approval. It may be my imagination—I wasn't as assiduous a viewer of the European show as I might have been—but it seems to me that the Australian *Knockout* is altogether rougher, and involves even more skimpily clad persons of both sexes being dumped even more frequently in the water. It was never a particularly sophisticated or ennobling game. Down here, though, like everything else, it seems to be being played under Australian rules.

My impressions of Aussie television are based almost entirely on Melbourne viewing. I suspect they would be much the same if I was in Sydney, Brisbane or Adelaide, since the ABC, the three commercial networks and the multicultural Special Broadcasting Service are established in all four eastern capitals (though SBS has only been in Brisbane and Adelaide since early July). But they'd probably be a good deal different if I was writing this from Perth (which is nearer Singapore than it is Melbourne), and God knows what it would be like if I was in Darwin, Port Pirie or Wagga Wagga. Australia has 49 commercial tv stations, but most of them are in the east: there are fifteen in New South Wales, eleven in Queensland, nine in the more compact Victoria and two in Tasmania, leaving only six for Western Australia and one for the Northern Territory, which is so irregularly populated as to be a tv engineer's nightmare. In addition, the ABC has just short of 90 stations, much more evenly spread across the continent's enormous land mass, about twice as many 'translator' stations, relaying a parent-station signal to outlying communities, and is soon to be made available to the deepest outback, thanks to Aussat.

The east, in other words—from

Brisbane in the north, down the coast to Sydney, down and round to Melbourne, and further round again to Adelaide—dominates Australian television. And the Sydney-Melbourne axis dominates that, as it dominates so much else in Australian life. From Melbourne, the initial impression is that Australia has embraced television with the same fervour with which certain South Pacific islands took to the cargo cult. It is a largely unproblematic love affair, similarly dependent on phantom goodies from overseas. In a recent survey, 63 per cent of Australians plumped for television as the best source of news, with newspapers trailing badly at 22 per cent, and radio a poor third at 15 per cent. Scanning the letters page of Sydney and Melbourne newspapers, one finds at least a letter a day on a tv topic, whether it be the Seven Network's monopoly of sport, or the recent sacking of Bert Newton, the genial, moon-faced host of a long-running talent show called *New Faces*. In Australia, television matters.

The ABC has a similar mandate to the BBC's, but has to operate on Government hand-outs rather than a licence fee. Constantly sniped at by the Australian Labour Party, it is up against a regulated but none the less American-style commercial system which consistently batters it in the ratings. The ABC has by far the highest proportion of Australian-made drama, documentary and current affairs programmes, which tend to be instantly recognisable: there is a definite ABC house style which can be—and, to judge by audience figures, is—off-putting. At all events, the Corporation's

highest-rated shows are two British imports, *Yes, Minister* and *Minder*. And they can scarcely compete with the commercial channels' blockbuster purchases: *Dynasty* (on the Nine Network), *Dallas* and *The A-Team* (both on Murdoch's Ten Network).

Even with that old public-service standby, the news, the ABC has problems. Earlier this year, it revamped its early evening bulletin into something called *The National*, a high-profile news and current affairs programme with a reported budget of A\$25 million (£12.5 million). Launched with massive publicity and to great expectations, *The National* bombed with audiences: on certain nights in Victoria, the Nine and Ten Networks beat it five to one in audience shares.

As far as news presentation goes, Australian viewers seem to prefer the American style offered by the commercial networks, which punctuate the day—and the night—with snappy little 'Eyewitness News Updates', jovial chit-chat between the presenters, computerised weather maps, short, punchy satellite reports from the day's international disaster zones, and as many 'human interest' stories as possible. Discussion is not a decisive factor. Nor is discretion: a few months ago, news cameras found their way into the intensive care ward of a Sydney hospital and, with all the wobbly telephoto shots of which top television voyeurism is made, let us in on the dying seconds of a three-year-old succumbing to pneumonia inside an oxygen tent. Against that kind of sensationalism, the ABC's

Newsreader George Donikian and floor manager/cameraman Stephen Rushworth of the 0/28 Channel: 'arguably the best overseas news service on Australian TV.'



National, with its policy of in-depth coverage, comment and debate, doesn't seem to have much chance. Its format is closest to that of the UK's *Channel 4 News* and its fate seems likely to be similar: an admirable concept out of kilter with the times.

The commercial channels personalise their service relentlessly—one Melbourne channel, for instance, runs ads for its news bulletin with the theme of 'Tell me, Brian!' built around its top presenter. Show and tell is what counts, not debate. Channel identification is an important part of Australian television, too: on every hour and half hour, sometimes more frequently, each channel runs its own little puff, complete with sophisticated graphic and catchy tune. 'Yes, you're home on Ten,' carols the Murdoch network, as a giant '10' in a golden circle lands on the middle of the continent like a huge quoit—slap on top of Alice Springs, in fact, where they can't get Ten. 'Hello, Melbourne,' chortles its rival, 'Channel Seven's with you,' appealing to more local interests, over scenes from the city's life that make the place look like a cross between San Francisco and a country town: joggers, trams, sailing boats and bikini-clad bums ('I saw some broad-beamed beauties on St Kilda beach,' goes the jingle linking the last two). On Nine, a brilliant piece of computer graphics has the camera—presumably located in a swooping space craft—zoom in across a stylised Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, before ending up on the Channel's logo, glittering among the stars. The channel identifications are compulsive viewing: my ten-month-old daughter will drop everything, even teddy, when they're on.

The real staples of Australian television, however, are those standbys of American TV: sport, soap operas, game shows and movies. But, imports apart, Australia

has developed its own versions of them all. Geography has helped, of course: the continent is too far away from everywhere else to be threatened by overspill from other countries' television (a problem which has hit European countries with similar population sizes, like Holland and Switzerland). And the main population centres are so far apart that each is, in terms of broadcast technology, autonomous. It is not quite as simple as that the public wants what the public gets, but the commercial networks have nevertheless been able to shape audience tastes pretty decisively, thanks to what, given the size of the population, can only be described as saturation methods.

In Melbourne, I am offered 650 hours of television a week. Seven and Nine keep going 24 hours a day, Seven by the brutally simple if culturally confusing ploy of simply relaying a satellite relay of America's Cable News Network between 2 am and 7 am. Ten is off the air week nights between 2 am and 6 am, but fills the slot on Friday and Saturday nights with all-night rock videos. The ABC runs from 8 am to midnight, and SBS broadcasts for around nine hours a day (from 3 pm to midnight at weekends, and from 11 am to around midnight, with a three-hour break in the afternoon, on weekdays). Insomniacs and the house-bound can be guaranteed at least two, more likely four and often five channels at any time of the day or night.

Movies are the primetime flagships. The networks like them because they grab the ratings at a comparatively low per-hour cost, and they fill the 8.30 to 10.30 slot most evenings. In an average week, there are around ninety hours of feature films, though that figure is boosted by the old movies—sometimes very good old movies—with which Nine fills its nights, between its late-night sitcom and its dawn cartoon. I haven't

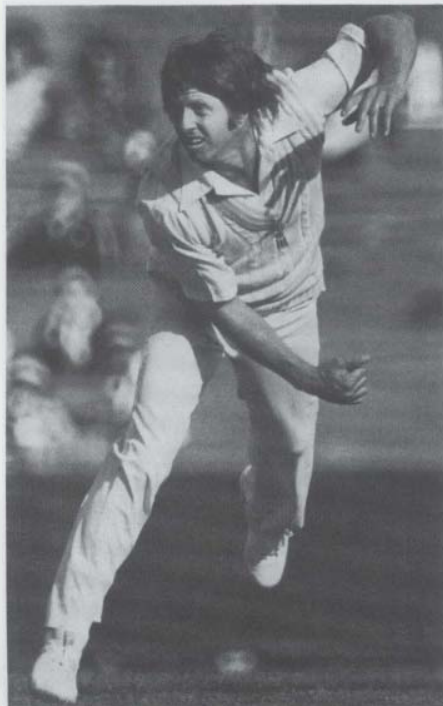
carried out a full survey, but the movies seem to be shown complete, except for those explicitly labelled 'Modified for Television'. In a recent screening of *Chinatown*, for instance, Jack Nicholson got his nose slit on screen, which is more than happened on TV a few years back. And the holdbacks are fairly short—a factor presumably accounted for by the almost total absence of second-run movie houses in the eastern capitals. Recent biggies have included *Absence of Malice*, *The Outsiders* and *Breakdance*. *An Officer and a Gentleman* looms. The thinking behind all this is not hard to see: Australia has a very high penetration of VCRs (it appears almost mandatory to pick one up in Singapore on your way home), and new movies combat the inroads of rented video-cassettes.

Sport, on the other hand, is something Australian television has perfected all on its own. Australia is very much a leisure-oriented society, and sport carries the sort of values the older Protestant countries attach to work. Sporting achievement is crucial to Australians, and the injection of the right mixture of skill and excitement into television coverage is part and parcel of that. The Nine Network has made much of its reputation on sport, and rightly so: the Packer team's coverage of cricket has turned it into a major television spectator sport, rather than the gentle afternoon pastime it used to be on British telly. And they have done so by adopting much the same tactics as those used by the American networks to inject a bit of life into those other two stop-go sports, baseball and American football—that is, jazzy, highly evaluative commentaries, computed averages which set up new records every half hour ('The quickest quarter-century by a Victorian lefthander against Sri Lanka there, Richie') and eternal replays of the brief flurries of excitement that punctuate the measured pace of cricket.

What Packer & Co haven't managed to do yet is combine the Australian obsession with sport with the Australian desire to win. As the Olympics revealed, the local mob doesn't always come out on top, and viewers tend to switch over when they don't. In February, for example, there was the cricketing World Cup. With scant regard for ratings, the final turned out to be between India and Pakistan, and the viewing figures took a plunge. Something of the same thing has been happening with Wimbledon and the Test Match: the pride of Oz has not been performing up to par. Pat Cash got knocked out of Wimbledon distressingly early from a television point of view, and the Poms turn out to have learned a thing or two since *Bodyline*. To cap it all, Nine, which got exclusive rights to both, has had to contend with them both going on at the same time.

If sport rules the weekend, less noble forms of competition dominate the late-afternoon schedules during the week. After thirty years of television, game

Sports and games. Left: fast bowler Jeff Thompson. Right: Greg Evans, presenter of *Perfect Match*, in fancy dress with Debbie Newsome.





Prisoner: trouble at Wentworth Detention Centre.

shows are much the same everywhere in the world. Australia, for instance, has *Blankety Blanks* (it's plural here), *Sale of the Century* and *Wheel of Fortune* to keep consumer thinking alive. And then there is *Perfect Match*, to appeal to the parts greed cannot reach. Originally imported from the us and now firmly and unforgettably Ozzified, *Perfect Match* shows five days a week. It is hosted by Greg Evans, one of those tv personalities who seems to have been born with perfect teeth, a perfect tan and a complete wardrobe of designer sportswear. The rules of *Perfect Match* go like this: a man (or a woman: the game alternates) is on one side of a divided stage; hidden from him (or her) on the other side are three women (or men)—or girls and fellas, as Greg likes to call them. The 'contestant' gets to ask his or her prospective dates three nudge-nudge questions each; the dates give clever answers, and the contestant picks the cleverest or the dumbest or the most suggestive. Meanwhile Greg quips, the audience giggles, eyes sparkle and a few brand names get mentioned.

After the three questions, the contestant chooses, and a hideous little mock computer called Dexter—an antipodean cousin to Dusty Bin—tells him/her he/she was perfectly matched, not with Cheryl or Grant, but with Raelene or Tony. Channel Ten then sends them off for the weekend, courtesy of a string of companies—airlines, hotel chains—which are endlessly named and thanked. Next week, they come back and complain about each other's shortcomings, all to rounds of applause, flashing smiles, risqué jokes by Greg and sudden 'revealing' close-ups of the couple in little pink, heart-shaped haloes. It is an extraordinary exercise in

public humiliation, vulgarity, innuendo and the reduction of human relationships to a points system. And it is, of course, compulsive viewing. It also, in all probability, accounts for why the Ten Network News, which follows immediately afterwards, rates so highly.

The other originally American genre which Australian audiences have taken to their hearts is soap opera. Aussie soaps, of course, are no strangers to daytime viewers in the UK where, picked up for rock-bottom prices, *A Country Practice*, *Sons and Daughters*, *The Young Doctors* and *The Sullivans* throng the afternoon airwaves. There are a few

more to look forward to: *Prisoner*, set in a women's jail, where marriages and sieges are weekly occurrences; *Neighbours*, set on an ordinary suburban street where somebody seems to have put something in the water; and *Possession*, a bizarre mixture of obscure criminal acts and intense emotional problems, which looks rather as though the cast of *Dynasty*, diverted because of fog to the East Midlands airport, has somehow ended up at the Crossroads Motel and, for reasons known only to the story editor, decided to try to pass themselves off as natives. Not surprisingly, *Possession* has not prospered.

Soap operas, of course, help the networks meet their Australian content quotas, and are about the only form of drama to appear on the commercial channels, with the exception of the odd mini-series, like the unforgettable *Return to Eden*, in which Rebecca Gilling tangled with a crocodile and was rescued by a handsome plastic surgeon. A sequel is now being made. You saw the series. You bought the handbag. Now watch on. Australian soap operas, however, are not like their American counterparts, and certainly not their British ones. The folk in them are ordinary enough; but, where the characters in British soaps have affairs, lose their jobs and get letters from old lovers, the characters in the Australian brand, though wearing the same polyester clothes and afflicted with the same sense of *Daily Mail* propriety, are more likely to die lingering deaths or kill each other. It used to be one of the jokes about British soaps that, when the writers wanted to get rid of a character, they sent him to Australia. Having arrived in Australia, there seems to be no option left but to die.

A Country Practice, the top evening soap, has just revelled in the protracted death of Molly, its lovable eccentric, from leukemia. It took weeks. First, she

A Country Practice: Molly's birthday party.



had to say tearful farewells to everyone; then there were flashbacks to all her good times (which saved a fair bit of money, since chunks of old programmes were re-run at length). Then Molly checked herself out of hospital. She came home. She baked cakes. She made toys for her daughter, Chloe. Then, one evening, as Chloe ran across a field after a kite Molly had made for her, the screen—it was a subjective shot—slowly faded to black. Molly was gone. As if that was not enough, two weeks later someone shot Fatso the wombat, the programme's only other equivocally nice person. To hold on to *their* audiences, *Sons and Daughters* recently had a murder, *Possession* has one per episode, and *Prisoner* has just gone through a full-scale riot. Australian soaps grab their audiences with the same cliff-hangers, but the gentle world of *Mrs Dale's Diary*, where it was trauma-time when Mrs Freeman's cat, Captain, went missing, is far away indeed. Soaps, too, are played according to Australian rules.

If the commercial networks Ozzify American TV and the ABC—with the exception of its rock music programmes, a new consumer series and the odd pointed documentary—is a pale imitation of the BBC, SBS, the multi-cultural channel, is utterly and wonderfully unique. Its *World News* is the most cosmopolitan to be seen on any TV anywhere in the world—far more likely

to lead on political developments in Paraguay or a strike in Denmark than on the latest packaged feed from the White House press office. Hampered by a minuscule budget of A\$2 million a year, SBS news is heavily reliant on feeds from Visnews and Asiavision. But the use it makes of those feeds is exemplary. Unlike on the BBC, ABC, NBC and CBS, world news on SBS *means* world news. On the sport front, SBS has an hour of soccer every Saturday in which, again, the spread is exemplary: the week's match is as likely to come from Spain, Greece, Germany or South America as from Highbury (though a recent attempt to bring us the league leadership struggle from Yugoslavia was thwarted by what the presenter apologetically called 'the worst condition videotape we have ever received').

With its multi-cultural mandate, SBS spends over half its air-time talking in tongues: about five hours a week each in Serbian and Greek, four hours of German, Arabic and Italian, and an hour or so each of French, Norwegian, Polish, Hungarian, Portuguese and Spanish. Former Sydney Film Festival director David Stratton hosts a 'Movie of the Week', which recalls the great days of BBC2. And the evening dramas are a TV junkie's delight, enabling one to tune in to the best (and, equally importantly, the worst) of world television: a Greek musical drama series called *Piraeus Blues*, a thirteen-part Polish

historical mini-series, a weekly Yugoslav soap opera, Lebanese love stories in which everybody sings, a wonderful German cop series called *Derrick*, about a battered and sardonic Munich detective, and the unforgettable Argentinian supersoap, *Rosa de Lejos*. Last week, Esteban decided to become a lawyer, ending weeks of speculation, and Margareta was still having trouble adjusting to life in the big city. This week, Esteban will tell Rosa of his decision, and Roberto tells what he decided to do while lunching with Laura. All in wonderful, 115 per cent colour, lit with high-intensity lights that make the characters look as though they're caught in the headlights of a car. It's a TV addict's wonderland, enough to compensate for the fact that *Brookside* doesn't play down under.

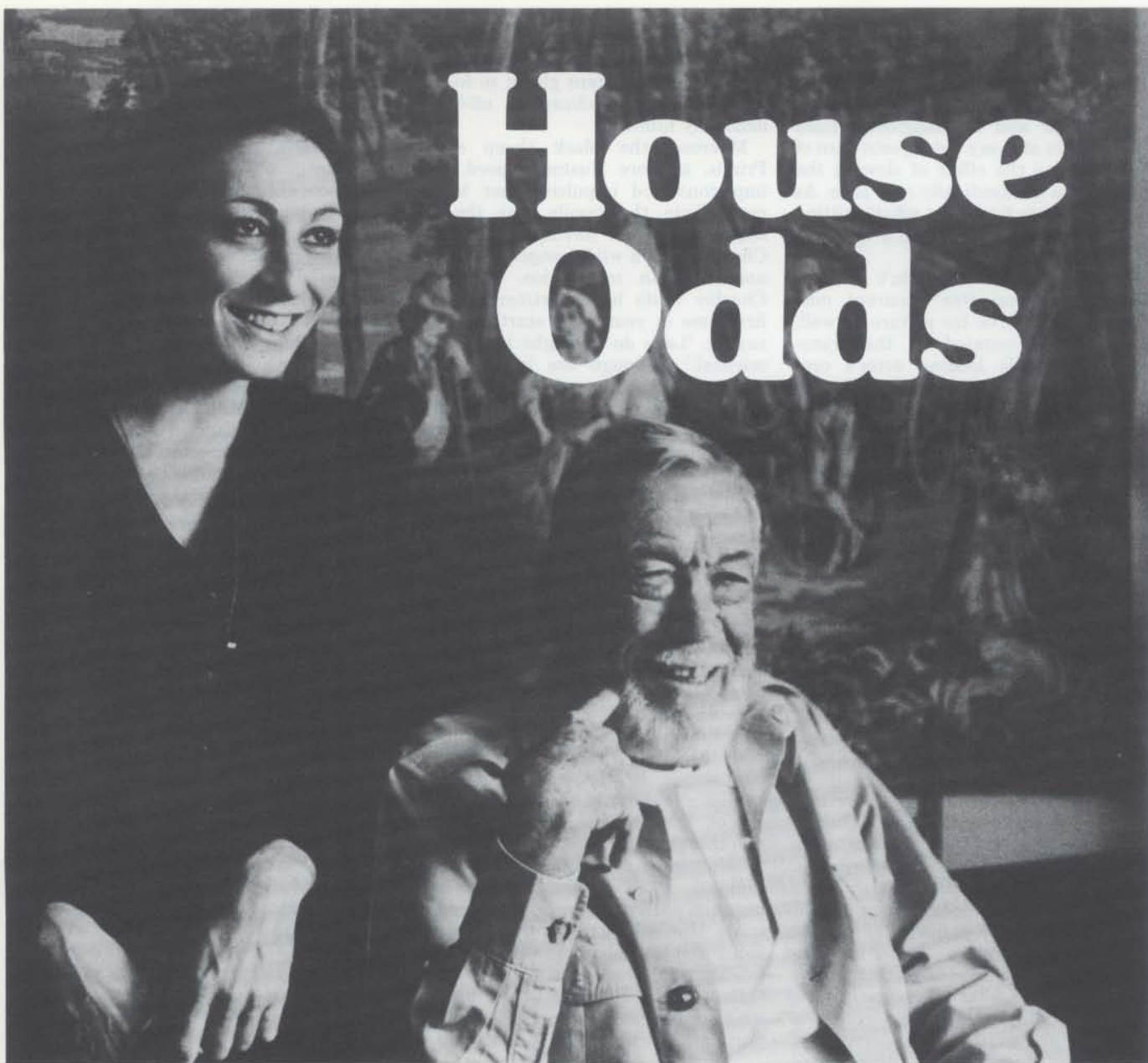
In fact, SBS is too good to be true: and, in recognition of the fact, the broadcasting tribunal is shifting it from its present VHF channel to a UHF one from next January. That will mean that its target audience—first generation immigrants—probably won't have the sets to receive it any more. A move of simple brilliance, in fact. As things are now, SBS confirms that Australia is less and less an Anglo-Saxon outpost, and more and more the sort of cultural mix you got in New York at the turn of the century. Australian TV, in other words, is new world television, unashamed, unbridled and magnificent. ■

London International Film School

- ★ Training film makers for over 25 years
- ★ Graduates now working worldwide
- ★ Located in Covent Garden in the heart of London
- ★ Recognised by the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians
- ★ 16mm documentary and 35mm studio filming
- ★ Two year Diploma course in film making commences three times a year: January, April, September.

Contact:

The Administrator, London International Film School, Department SH6
24 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HP. Telephone 01-836 0826



John Huston with his daughter Anjelica.

In 1950, James Agee wrote of John Huston: 'In his life, his dealings and his work as an artist he operates largely by instinct, unencumbered by much reflectiveness or abstract thinking, or any serious self-doubt.' And thirty-five years later, Huston doesn't seem to have changed a bit: he's still working on gall and intuition, trusting his wits, his actors and what Agee called 'the peculiar kind of well-earned luck which Heaven reserves for the intuitive and the intrepid.' He has made thirty movies since 1950—including a big-budget musical, a couple of Westerns, a handful of thrillers, *The Bible*, *Moby Dick*, a biography of Freud, an Arthur Miller original and adaptations of Stephen Crane, Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams, Flannery O'Connor, Malcolm Lowry and Kipling—and his luck, in individual films, has frequently deserted him, unpredictably: his failures range from heroic near-misses on ambitious projects (*Moby Dick*, *Under the Volcano*) to unabashedly 'commercial' pictures sabotaged by indifference and laziness

(*Annie*, *The Mackintosh Man*). But his gambler's mix of heedlessness, ego and fatalism has made him, uniquely among major American directors, just about impervious to failure: he has had far more flops than hits, and he has still made nearly a film a year for over forty

Terrence Rafferty

years. 'The calendar takes care of everything,' says his daughter Anjelica in *Prizzi's Honour*, and her eyes move towards the camera as she says it.

Prizzi's Honour is, like every good Huston picture, unlikely, miraculous: a quirky, deadpan Mafia comedy, perversely cast and staged with such confident disregard for period detail that we're never quite sure whether the story is set in the 1950s or the 1980s or some time in between. Jack Nicholson, of all people, plays Charley Partanna, the

underboss and enforcer of the Brooklyn Prizzi family, a good soldier who's shrewd in the ways of 'the environment' but in little else; when he falls in love with Irene Walker, a freelance contract killer played by Kathleen Turner, his awestruck slowness of response is sort of endearing—but it's the same dullness that allows him to kill unquestioningly for the Prizzis.

Whatever inspired Huston to cast the quick-witted Nicholson as this gaping, smitten thug, the gamble pays off beautifully. Nicholson has been telling interviewers that he didn't get *Prizzi's Honour* at all when he first read it and never felt comfortable with his role, but put his 'not understanding the material together with the character's dumbness into a kind of dynamic on how to play him.' Enough of the actor's natural intelligence comes through—despite a padded upper lip, a thick Brooklyn accent and the nauseating yellow sports jacket he wears in his first big romantic scene—to keep Charley Partanna from becoming just a violent clown and the

film from crossing the line between ironic fable and crude cartoon. And Nicholson's performance seems to give the movie its distinctive and satisfying rhythm: his watchful but slightly stupefied air and his languidly timed double-takes at every outrageous turn of the plot have the effect of slowing the narrative to a majestically easy pace. As Charley tries to figure out what's hitting him, we, and Huston, take a little extra time to savour the jokes.

Huston, of course, couldn't possibly have known that this apparent mis-casting would serve his picture so well, couldn't have counted on the transformation of his leading actor's confusion into a real and vivid quality of the character. As he has done so many times before, he just played a hunch. Agee's description of the performance of Alfonso Bedoya, the non-professional whom Huston cast as the grinning, volatile bandit 'Gold Hat' in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, gives an early look at the director's method: 'It worked because this inadequate actor was trying so hard, was so unsure of what he was doing and was so painfully confused and angered by Huston's cryptic passivity. These several kinds of strain and uncertainty, sprung against the context of the story, made a living image of the almost unactable, real thing; and that had been Huston's hunch.'

The casting of Nicholson in *Prizzi's Honour* is a similar kind of good Huston hunch, and the product of one or more kinds of shrewdness. Aesthetically, Huston might have seen that Nicholson's customary heavy-lidded cunning and sly, drawling speech patterns could, with a little exaggeration, pass for the mannerisms of a stupid man; financially, he surely knew that his name in the credits would help get this eccentric project off the ground. And personally, he may have hoped that the presence of Nicholson, the longtime companion of Anjelica Huston, would somehow make it easier for him to coax the performance he needed out of his daughter.

Playing Maerose Prizzi, Charley's ex-lover and the grand-daughter of Don Corrado, the head of the Prizzi family, Anjelica Huston has the role that's the heart of the picture, the real *Huston* part. Although John Huston himself, by virtue of his age, his crafty intelligence, and his proficiency at acting alarming patriarchs, could certainly have taken the role of Don Corrado, the character really isn't the kind of natural extension of Huston's personality that his roles in *Chinatown* and *Winter Kills* (adapted, like *Prizzi's Honour*, from a Richard Condon novel) seemed to be: robust, high-rolling tycoons whose dominance (and unscrupulousness) is the product of gigantic and varied appetites. Don Corrado—played wonderfully by William Hickey in the film—is greedy and playfully devious, but he's a small man, shrivelled meanly in the corners of the deep red, throne-like chairs in his Brooklyn home, and the size of his appetites is precisely expressed by the

plate of little cookies that's the centre-piece of a key scene between him and Maerose: he offers her one, with a dirty but not very insistent gleam in his eye, and when she declines he nibbles it delicately himself.

Maerose, the black sheep of the Prizzis, is more Huston's speed. She's imperious and impulsive: her banishment from the family was the consequence of her having 'dishonoured' Charley with a wild, vengeful fling with another man in Mexico, and when Charley visits her apartment, for the first time in years, she startles him by saying, 'Let's do it. Right here on the oriental.' Although she is as cunning and unforgiving as the rest of the Prizzis, the wounds that Maerose schemes to avenge are large matters of personal pride, not petty financial embarrassments: she wants to make her father suffer for exiling her, and she wants Charley back. When Charley asks Maerose's advice about Irene Walker, after he discovers that his new love has been stealing from the Prizzis' casino in Las Vegas ('Do I ice her? Do I marry her?') and Maerose responds with her line about the calendar taking care of everything, we can tell by the look in her eyes that she plans to take care of a few things all by herself.

In the end, Maerose has her triumph, and Anjelica Huston's face is the last image in the movie before the credits roll. John Huston seems to have chosen his daughter to stand in for him this time, to represent on screen the family traits: a combination of philosophical fatalism—the let's-see-what-happens passivity which has sometimes made Huston's actors very uncomfortable—and a steely determination to get exactly what one wants.

Huston's statements about his own working methods often suggest an improvisational (or what Mailer, who de-

veloped some of his own eccentric theory and practice of movies from reflections on *The Maltese Falcon*, might call 'existential') approach to film-making. He told Agee, 'In pictures, if you do it right, *the thing happens, right there on the screen*,' and he wrote in his 1980 autobiography, *An Open Book*, 'It is best to shoot chronologically. In this way you can benefit by accidents, and you don't paint yourself into corners.' And his heterogeneous, almost random choice of material ('I read without discipline,' he has said) tends to confirm that impression. (His taste—good enough to attract him to Melville, Crane, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor, bad enough to drag him down into Romain Gary, Arthur Miller and John Milius—is as erratic as that of America's other great free-style director, Robert Altman.) He has certainly never been a meticulous planner, much less a believer in storyboards, but—with the exception of the loose, goofy *Beat the Devil*—he doesn't just make it up as he goes along. In fact, it's hard to think of an American director who is more concerned with the architecture of scripts, or with the precise reproduction of literary effects on the screen. Like the character his daughter plays in *Prizzi's Honour*, John Huston isn't such a fatalist that he doesn't believe in making a good plot.

Huston began his career, after all, in the Hollywood studio system, and despite his reputation as a maverick, he seems not to have found the old system especially confining. His movie-making values, then and now, aren't really so different from those of a shrewd producer or a studio boss: strong story, swift, efficient shooting and performances charged with the volatile immediacy of star power. He just takes all the elements a little further, enforcing the traditional Hollywood aesthetic by pushing it to the extreme, so that the

Prizzi's Honour: Lee Richardson (left), William Hickey, Robert Loggia.



picture won't go dead on the screen: not just strong stories, then, but overstuffed, baroque ones or established classics; shooting concentrated to a form of dare-devil shorthand, with few multiple takes and fewer master shots; and a conception of acting based on accidental revelations, an attempt to trap the startling aliveness that gives stars like Bogart or Nicholson a heightened reality.

This last quality is what has often made Huston seem inspired, even radical. His films with Bogart are an extraordinary series of explorations of a personality, a surprisingly varied set of discoveries about the features of a rather ordinary face: the grin that looks cool and vaguely menacing in *The Maltese Falcon* is avid, psychotic in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, then bizarrely romantic in *The African Queen*, and finally rather innocent and bemused in the international babel of *Beat the Devil*. Huston's search for those elusive, 'unactable' qualities that transcend the role has also made him appear, at times, merely quixotic and wrongheaded. He hoped, clearly, that Audie Murphy's stature as a war hero would lend resonance to his performance as the young soldier in *The Red Badge of Courage*. But Murphy's limitations as an actor defeated him; and Huston's eagerness to direct Marilyn Monroe in *The Misfits*, in a role obviously designed to reveal some version of her 'true' self, must have blinded him to the defects of the pompous, overexplicit script. Like all Hollywood film-makers, though, Huston's primary concern has always been story; he may have looked like a rebel in the 1940s simply because he wasn't satisfied with the illusions of reality that conventional pictures settled for. He worked out a way to make his tall tales grittier and more spontaneous-looking—the better to put them over on us.

Prizzi's Honour, like *The Maltese Falcon*, is an ideal Huston story: an intricate, layered fable in which fate disguises itself as a series of outrageous accidents, a plot which is just one damn thing after another until it all winds up, somehow, at a predetermined end. It's a dark, gleaming engine, full of schemes, catastrophes, sudden revelations and unforeseen consequences, and dense with conflicting motives and interests. And like *The Maltese Falcon*, *Prizzi's Honour* has at its centre an edgy romance that is resolved, finally, in a lightning burst of pragmatism, a shrewd act performed with the shocking speed of instinct. Everything we need to know about how this plot will turn out is in the quick tableaux which open the picture, showing Charley's youth from his birth, with his father and Don Corrado looking on, to his initiation into the crime family, mingling his blood with the old don's as he swears to uphold Prizzi honour.

Huston never quite lets us forget that the Prizzi organisation is a closed system, the kind of self-perpetuating principle that always wins out over individual desires, or that Charley's



Jack Nicholson.

romance with Irene is just a little grit in the smoothly functioning machinery, easily ground away—but the furious complications keep us distracted from the inexorability built into the conception. He achieves this effect, in part, with a concentrated visual and narrative plan that keeps us *inside* most of the time, within the Prizzis' homes and offices, and avoids the light-and-dark contrasts which defined the difference between the underworld and the world outside in the *Godfather* films. The Prizzis' universe is lit normally and there's nothing in the film to compare it to, and before long even Don Corrado, who shows a surprising flexibility on questions of Prizzi honour, looks nearly reasonable. And that allows Huston to spring his characteristic joke: all the activity, the characters' elaborate calculations of cause and effect, is just lively, meaningless diversion, and the apparent flexibility of the Prizzi code means only that it's a very *smart* system. As always in Huston, the gamblers have a good run, but the house wins. The bird is a fake. The gold does blow away.

In his autobiography, Huston claims not to be aware of any favourite themes in his movies. Unreflective even now, in his seventies, he also denies awareness of a personal style; in fact, he refuses to admit anything that would impose a pattern on his life or his work. But he is certainly drawn to stories of failure (he acknowledges, grudgingly, that 'success stories, per se, are not really of much interest to me'): sometimes extravagant, as in *Moby Dick*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *The Man Who Would Be King*; sometimes small, personal and pathetic, as in *Fat City* and *Under the Volcano*; and sometimes, as in his first

picture and his latest, small but intricately ironic.

The movies of the first group show Huston at his most expansive, with wide vistas of seas and mountains and deserts, empty except for a handful of figures and a cosmic laugh. The second kind of story is a trouble area for him: he clearly believes in the material—perhaps too much. These tales of inevitable decline are straightforward almost to the point of abstraction, as if the truth of Billy Tully's or the Consul's fate were so self-evident that it need only be presented. Despite their spare beauties, these movies are more relentless than dramatic. And the films that (as of now) frame this long career are the best, richest Hustons of all: between *The Maltese Falcon* and *Prizzi's Honour*, the full range of his work is visible, and in more than a temporal sense. The immense good humour of these two works, their evident delight in both complication and ironic resolution, is more revealing of Huston than his autobiography is. (When people say, 'My life is an open book,' what they mean is they're not going to tell you any more about themselves than you already know.)

In these movies, the contradictions in Huston's style and in his vision are precisely balanced: they're like lessons in Hollywood movie-making, without illusions but without despair. The system (the Knights of Malta, the Prizzi family, the classical script) prevails, as it was designed to, but the individuals in it can have an exhilarating ride on the twisting, accident-strewn paths along the way, gambling with their lives and filling their roles with the unpredictable and unsustainable energy of risky acting, caught at the moment it bursts the frame—and persisting, as images do, beyond the running out of the movie's time.

John Huston knows all about that kind of persistence, the indelible joys of transitory moments. When he's on a roll, as he is in *Prizzi's Honour*, as he was over forty years ago in *The Maltese Falcon*, everything appears to take care of itself and the calendar hardly matters. The style is constant and, unself-consciously, timeless: *The Maltese Falcon* is as fresh and fast as any contemporary picture, *Prizzi's Honour* as grandly and confidently crafted as a studio movie of the 40s. At the climax of *Prizzi's Honour*, Huston does something a little uncharacteristic of his traditionally clean, straightforward technique—he slows the movement of the film's final murder almost to a stop, suspends each instant of what would in real time be an uncommonly swift action. He doesn't really need to freeze the moment in order to heighten it; the scene would be shocking enough on its own. It's a bit arbitrary, but it seems wholly appropriate that Huston, as usual, went ahead and said 'Let's do it'—allowing himself perhaps to savour his success at the movie-maker's game of making time stand still. For the moment, John Huston seems to have beaten the odds. ■



Marshall McLuhan.

ON MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S TELEVISION PICTURE

Brian Winston

Marshall McLuhan's television set, arguably one of history's most influential, was more out of tune and more impervious to tuning than any other I have encountered. The not unusual combination of man-made structures, natural barriers and old-fashioned North American vhf 525-line tv rendered his particular corner of Toronto almost signal-free. Hence, I would suggest, he could write: 'The mode of the tv image has nothing in common with film or photo, except that it offers also a non-verbal *gestalt* of posture of forms... The tv image is visually low in data. The tv image is not a *still shot*. It is not photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things lined by the scanning finger. The resultant plastic contour appears by light *through*, not light *on*, and the image so formed has the quality of sculpture or icon, rather than of picture.'

I do not want to make too much of the McLuhan household receiver (after all, he wrote the above before acquiring the house I knew), but there can be no question of the potency of the above thought. It echoes through the next decades and its power appears undimmed today. The literature on television and especially, I fear, the growing contribution of film scholars to that literature are particularly prone to the conceit. Most scholarly film journals when they turn to television readily yield this sort of thing: 'The scanning beam is constantly trying to complete an

always incomplete image. Even if the image on the screen seems at rest, it is structurally in motion. Each television frame is always in a state of becoming.' McLuhan's gift was the concept of the wilful and indeed mendacious electron—a cousin, no doubt, to the selfish gene. It is a subatomic entity cursed like Sisyphus to a round of endless toil whose only joy is the knowledge that it can occasionally confuse the spectator into believing it is still when it is not.

It is but a small jump from the ceaseless electron to the neverending output of television itself. The programmes become, like the electron, the site of what one leading scholar has called 'a perpetual introduction of novelty on the basis of the repetition which never reaches a final conclusion.' In effect, we now have at the upper levels of discourse about television a sort of technological racism as to the difference between film and television, one that denies television any filmic qualities and suggests that the very act of viewing the two screens is different.

This whole argument has been erected in defiance of science, uncontaminated by the facts of image-making or the psychological realities of spectatorship, and it's probably naive to believe that physics and physiology will ever change the views of the true believers—but things are afoot which should dent the wilful electron's self-esteem. A Mr Tadokoro and his colleagues, you see, are eager to make the image on McLuhan's television screen every bit as good as that produced by a 35mm film.

Tadokoro is a representative of NHK (Japan's BBC) on the International Radio Consultative Committee (CCIR) which has been considering, for a number of years, radically changing our television system. He was one of no less than 35,000 broadcasting backroom persons who attended the 14th Montreux Television Symposium last summer at which the NHK 'high definition' television system (HDTV) was a main agenda item. NHK, with Sony, have perfected a television which produces an 1125 line picture on a screen 25 per cent wider than the current one. Whether or not this will become the new standard worldwide and how quickly that will happen if it does remains moot—but at Montreux the Italians showed a 'condensed movie' using the system and a French video-production house announced that it was installing the world's first commercially operating 1125 line facility.

Why 1125 lines? Exactly because that is, *pace* McLuhan and his many followers, the number needed to match the resolving capacity of standard 35mm film. And one can add another historical question here. Why 404-625 lines? Answer: exactly because that is the number of lines needed to match the resolving capacity of 16mm film. The number of lines both now and fifty years ago, when the present television standards were established, were not chosen by accident but with deliberate reference to the filmic image. We certainly do drive into the future, as McLuhan once

wisely suggested, with our eyes firmly fixed on the rearview mirror. With television standards, we did just that in the 1930s; and we are doing it again today.

This is not to deny the banal truth that a large screen occupying almost all the human field of vision viewed in the dark creates a different effect from that produced by a small screen barely occupying the central area of maximum human colour acuity viewed, normally, in the light. It is, however, to insist that such differences as exist can be easily measured and that there is no need and indeed, in truth, no basis for fancy theories accounting for further non-existent metaphysical distinctions. Further, it is to claim that an electronic image can be made to stimulate the retina just as effectively as a filmic image does.

The basic McLuhan supposition that the eye can be stimulated in different ways is absurd. The eye responds to light—end of story. Clearly light coloured by passage through chemical dyes and light caused by the emission of electrons in coloured phosphors are going to render the natural world differently, but the eye will see the visible wavelengths produced by either system with the same retinal rods and cones. As to the endlessly scanning electron finger, the illusion of movement is created exactly because the eye can no more see the pattern of scanning on the television tube than it can discern the movements of the film projector's shutter. Critical fusion factor, the phenomenon which allows the eye to confuse itself into believing that series of discrete still frames—in effect the substance of both film and television—are actually moving, works in both instances.

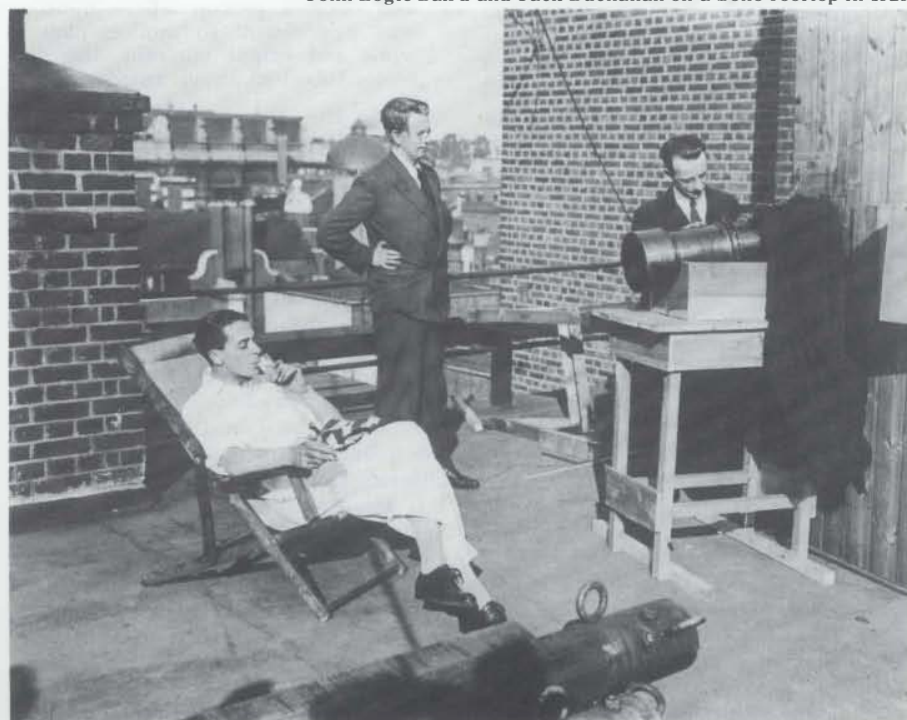
The film industry defines film stocks in terms of lines per millimetre of film surface. The limiting resolutions of emulsions can be determined when the

emulsion is used to photograph a chart upon which standardised blocks or lines of black have been printed. The film industry's norm was a 35mm film which could photograph 30 to 40 of these lines per millimetre. This same normal stock formatted for 16mm would, of course, also photograph the same number of lines per millimetre, but to far cruder effect since each line occupies more of the frame area. To match the resolving capacity of the 35mm norm, a 16mm stock would need to photograph around twice as many lines (i.e. 90 per millimetre). Conversely, the normal 16mm standard of 30-40 lines per millimetre can be matched on 35mm by 12 lines; and it was for that standard—12 lines per millimetre—that the television researchers aimed, since its electronic equivalent required only around 400-480 lines. In short, by the early 30s, the whole thrust of the research was directed towards creating a 400-line picture, the equivalent of the contemporary 16mm film image. This became the first 'high definition' television, the standard eventually adopted, in a slightly expanded 525/625-line guise, by most of the world.

From the beginning, all television researchers knew that film and television were sufficiently alike for many to have as their primary goal the building of a device which would be an alternative electronic delivery system for movies. (A note: John L. Baird had almost nothing to do with this. In fact John L. Baird, despite the excessive chauvinistic claims of the British press at the time and continued national sensitivity in the matter of television innovation, had almost nothing to do with the serious development of the technology at all.)

As Baird was setting up shop in 1925, Charles F. Jenkins, who had contributed to the development of the movie

'Almost nothing to do with the serious development of the technology . . .'
John Logie Baird and Jack Buchanan on a Soho rooftop in 1929.



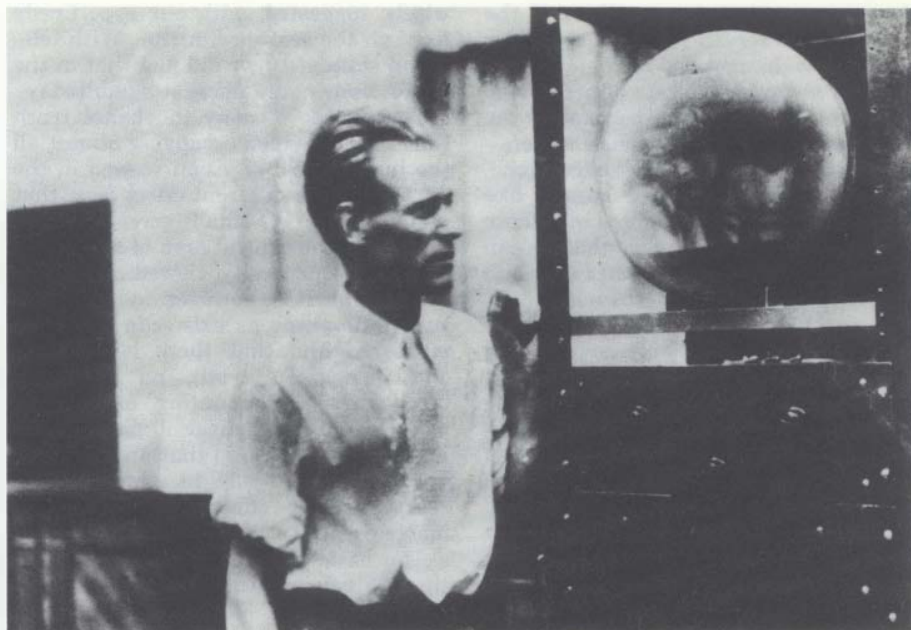
projector, demonstrated in Washington an elegant mechanical television device much like Baird's. It used a spinning prismatic disk to scan the image, but it could not work in reflected light and gave only a shadowgraph effect in the studio. Nevertheless, it was capable of transmitting images from a film projector; exactly what Jenkins, a film person, had in mind.

Two years later, in Bell Labs, another researcher, Herbert Ives (the father of the videophone), had the thought that *his* mechanical television scanning system would also work better if the camera looked at a filmed image of the real world rather than at the real world itself. The direct illumination of the film projector produced a television picture far brighter than could be achieved with any amount of light indirectly striking the original scene. He and his team made the conceptual jump from Jenkins' desire to replay existing films to filming the scene specifically to televise it.

In the following years the Germans took up the development of mechanical scanning, which was after all a German idea dating back to 1884. The firm, Fernseh A.G., produced a 180-line picture and 25 frames per second. The precision engineering of the system included the scanning disk being placed in a vacuum to reduce both interference and drive-power. Subsequently they achieved stability very close to contemporary all-electrical systems with a machine that represents non-electrical television in its final form and included a mechanically created variation on interlaced scanning. Since this system, like Jenkins', worked best when dealing with film rather than in the studio, Fernseh took up Ives' suggestion and carried it to its logical conclusion. A film camera was built with an attached developing tank. It produced a photographic image in under a minute which was then mechanically scanned for transmission—the intermediate film (IF) system.

All these devices were doomed (as the BBC had said of Baird at the outset) owing to 'the basic technical limitations of the method employed.' Electrical scanning with a cathode ray tube, rather than mechanical scanning with a spinning disk, had been proposed in 1908 (by a Briton, Campbell Swinton) and partially demonstrated four years later (by a Russian, Rozing). This was to prove the more effective answer, but even with electronic scanning the transmission of the filmed image loomed large.

Philo T. Farnsworth occupies a place in the received American history of television development analogous to Baird's position in the British imagination; but with more justice since he is one of television's true *inventors*. He was a rural Midwesterner who came from a Mormon home which only acquired electricity when he was fourteen. He learned his science from popular magazines and read up on mechanical television. At fifteen he confounded his high school chemistry teacher by describing, on the blackboard, an all-electric device which he thought might work better. He



Schoolboy inventor: Philo T. Farnsworth.

left the school and had no further formal education. In 1927, aged nineteen, he patented an electrical pick-up tube, that is to say electronic camera, of unique design. It operated on different principles from the Iconoscope then being developed by Vladimir Zworykin's team at RCA. Called an Image Dissector, it worked by translating the image into a pattern of electrons which were then passed across an aperture. It had the advantage of offering a more stable picture than RCA's but was far less sensitive than the Zworykin design. However, because of the primacy of film transmission in the late 20s, this did not necessarily seem too great a problem. As Farnsworth's biographer put it:

[A] picture produced by the dissector tube was of better definition and sharper contrast than that produced by the iconoscope. It became apparent that the Zworykin iconoscope was a superior instrument for use in studio and outdoor pickup where lighting was a problem. In motion picture work and bright sunlight, the dissector tube had an advantage.

Thus, the famous battle between Baird's mechanical apparatus and the EMI Emitron, the British version of Zworykin's camera, that began in November 1936 on the BBC was rather pointless, so unevenly matched were the two technologies. (In a matter of weeks, it was clear that chauvinism alone could not keep Baird in the ring, although his film scanner did work better than EMI's.) But a battle between the RCA Iconoscope and Farnsworth's Image Dissector, when the latter was joined to the Fernseh intermediate film apparatus, was a far different thing.

It was exactly such a run-off, between Telefunken (holders of the RCA patents in Germany) and Fernseh (with Farnsworth Image Dissectors and intermediate film) which began the world's first continuous public television service. Contrary to received opinion (especially in Britain), months before the BBC the Germans televised coverage of the Berlin Olympics

to a five-city network using both these systems. Fernseh had its Farnsworth camera, without intermediate film, for the indoor events only, such as swimming. Outdoors it used the IF system it had perfected. Telefunken used the Iconoscope (its version of the RCA Iconoscope) everywhere. No decision was made as to which system was superior, and on the eve of the war, three years later, the two were still transmitting competitively. However, by that time, RCA had done a deal with Farnsworth. The Iconoscope had become the Image Iconoscope, incorporating Farnsworth patents, and Fernseh were left as high and dry as Baird had been when the British opted for EMI (i.e. RCA) early in 1937. The transmission of film was no longer one of television's central purposes. Zworykin had *invented* a system which could stand alone.

Vladimir Zworykin emigrated to the United States after the Russian Revolution, failed to find work and returned to Omsk in March 1919, but came back six months later to a position with the Russian Embassy as a book-keeper. In 1920 he resumed his engineering career, securing a research post with Westinghouse. He had studied with Rozing at the Institute in St Petersburg and in 1912 had gone to the Collège de France to do graduate research in theoretical physics and X-rays. During the First World War in Russia he built tubes and aviation devices for the Signal Corps. In 1923 Zworykin patented a complete electrical television system including a pick-up tube, or camera, along the lines suggested by Campbell Swinton. The camera was, as was Rozing's receiver, adapted from the standard cathode ray tube but of a very different design. The electrons were now directed at an internal screen which they were forced, by magnets mounted outside the tube, to scan in a zigzag pattern.

Zworykin's camera tube, the Iconoscope, used a sensitive plate of mica coated with caesium, a soft silvery element which has the distinction of being

the first metal to have been identified with the aid of a spectroscope. (Until the nineteenth century, it had been mistaken for potassium salts.) In the tube Zworykin built, the photoelectrons are emitted the entire time the screen is illuminated by the spot but the charge is stored until the spot returns to build up the next frame. Then the electrons are discharged. In all the competing systems, whether mechanical or electrical, the stream of electrons was created by a fragment of light striking the cell and being discharged immediately. The Iconoscope's 'charge storage' system used the electrical consequences, as it were, of all the light in any one frame with an enormous increase in sensitivity. This was its advantage over Farnsworth's Image Dissector.

By 1932 Zworykin had a camera that worked more effectively, at least with reflected light in a studio, than any other available. It produced 240 lines matching the most advanced mechanical systems and was demonstrated by a wireless transmission from New York to the RCA laboratory in Camden 80 miles away. Early in 1934 Zworykin wrote:

The present sensitivity of the Iconoscope is approximately equal to that of a photographic film operating at the speed of a motion picture camera, with the same optical system... Some of the actually constructed tubes are good up to 500 lines with a good margin for future improvement.

Zworykin was fudging not a little by *not* specifying a 16mm motion picture camera—for that is all he would get with 500 lines.

The British contribution to the search for an electronic equivalent of 16mm film was much facilitated by corporate musical chairs in the late 20s. RCA took over Victor Phonograph Inc, which in turn owned the British Gramophone Company. Thus RCA, born when the US government dispossessed British Marconi in America after the First World War, came to own a slice of the British record industry. In 1931, the Gramophone Company was an element in the founding of EMI, and not only did

Research chief at EMI: Isaac Schoenberg.



RCA now have a share of an English laboratory but the director of research there, Isaac Schoenberg, was another of Rozing's ex-students from St Petersburg.

An official EMI account in the 50s suggested that the young 'believe everything of any importance in the [television] system came from the USA' and that this was a 'mistaken impression'. However, with RCA's David Sarnoff on the original EMI board, it is easy to see the source of the 'impression'. All the crucial television decisions the company took between 1931 and 1934 can be considered rational only in the light of the American connection. This is not to say that further important advances enhancing the viability of the system were not made in the UK, but to all intents and purposes the Emitron, EMI's earliest camera, was an Iconoscope by another name. Even today British *amour propre*, to put it no more strongly, finds this difficult to accept.

Schoenberg, in 1934, decided to adopt a 405-line standard, which makes little sense if we are asked to believe he made this decision *in vacuo*. After all, the official requirement was at that time pegged to Baird's best—240 lines:

It was the most dramatic moment in the whole of television development. He [Schoenberg] said, 'What we are going to do, in this competition, we're going to offer 405 lines, twin interlace. And we're going for Emitron. We're going to give up mirror drum scanning, we're going along the lines of the electronic camera.'

Sir Frank McGee, perhaps the most distinguished of Schoenberg's team, calls this 'the most courageous decision in the whole of his career', which it might well be; but it is difficult to believe that he took it without cognisance of what Zworykin had *publicly* announced, in January 1934, to be possible, never mind what private communication might have passed between the two labs. Zworykin recalls that two of Schoenberg's engineers visited his lab for three months in the winter of 1933/4. By 1934, 343 lines had been demonstrated on the RCA Iconoscope—not quite sufficient to match the definition of 16mm amateur movies. Zworykin, as his January 1934 paper reveals, was confident that this could be achieved. Schoenberg's decision to go for 405 lines and, therefore, an electronic system was without doubt farsighted; but it can scarcely be called 'the most dramatic moment in the whole of television development.' It is even more astonishing to find one of the engineers who visited RCA in 1933 claiming, in 1984, that:

McGee and EMI owe nothing to RCA and only in 1936 did the two companies sign an agreement for a complete exchange of patents and information.*

McGee protests in equally strong terms:

It has been said that the Emitron (made at EMI) was a straight copy of the iconoscope (made by RCA) and that we at EMI were largely dependent on know-how from the latter company.



1936: Marconi-EMI camera outside Alexandra Palace.

One reason advanced for this is that the tubes looked similar. Now I can state categorically that there was no exchange of know-how between the two companies in this field during the crucial period 1931 to 1936. And with regard to the similarity of the tubes, it would be clear to anyone with a minimum of technical perception that, given the situation as it existed at that time when we did not know how to make an efficient transparent signal plate or photo-mosaic, there was no other way such a tube could be constructed.*

The case basically rests on the claim that 'know-how' was not exchanged between the two companies:

Throughout the formative period of television RCA and EMI had certain commercial relations but these relations did not involve ownership of EMI or control of EMI policy by RCA, nor was there any exchange of research or manufacturing information on radio or television between the two companies. It is true that technical publications and copies of specifications of patent applications were exchanged, but 'know-how' was not exchanged because RCA was at that time only prepared to agree to such an exchange for a payment, which EMI was not prepared to make. It is significant that in 1937, when the EMI system was a proved success, a free exchange of 'know-how' was agreed. Thus the position was that RCA and EMI were developing television on a basis of friendly but quite spirited competition, with neither party giving away any secrets to the other.

What the significance of 'know-how' is to persons with 'a minimum of technical perception' remains somewhat mysterious. History clearly suggests that the essence of both cameras' design was laid down in a patent of Zworykin's dated 1923.

*In Bruce Norman, *Here's Looking At You*, Royal Television Society/BBC, 1984.

Zworykin worked for RCA. RCA owned a slice of EMI. EMI's research director shared a teacher in Russia with Zworykin. The teacher was a television pioneer. Contrary to some claims, EMI engineers did visit RCA. The Emitron looked, not like Zworykin's patent of 1923, but like his development of that patent, the Iconoscope of the early 30s. It was, as McGee himself confided to a technical journal 35 years ago, 'fundamentally the same as the iconoscope.'

Why, half a century beyond the events in question, there should still be such a shrill insistence on primacy cannot be here addressed; suffice it to say, though, that in the long term it might drown out the real achievements of the British in this story.

The American Iconoscope, in the early 30s, was barely usable, being very noisy. Indeed, the tube produced more noise than picture and was a lot less impressive than the high definition mechanical scanning systems then coming on line from Baird and the Germans. The reasons for this poor performance were properly analysed and ultimately corrected first at EMI. Most significantly, the then mysterious process whereby the electronic signal was derived from the tube was first elucidated by McGee. Secondary emission of electrons, within the tube, were found to be crucial. As a consequence of this understanding, the team of Blumlein, Browne and White (the first two of whom were to die testing experimental radar equipment in flight in 1942) set about suppressing the unwanted signals. The patented circuits which did this were passed back to Zworykin and incorporated into the RCA camera—the 1936 exchange of patents referred to above. RCA never signed patent agreements, always buying what it needed outright. This is one of only two occasions in the 30s when this

company policy was broken, obviously because of the closeness of the two organisations. The importance of the British development should not be understated. McGee, in the Emitron, made the Iconoscope work—but it was, all protests aside, nevertheless an Iconoscope.

The only other occasion upon which RCA was forced to sign a licence agreement was with Farnsworth. In 1935, after a three year proceeding, Farnsworth had won a legal action against Zworykin and RCA. Farnsworth's device scanned an *electronic* image—in the words of his 1927 patent application, he had designed 'an apparatus for television which comprises means for forming an electrical image.' Zworykin, in his 1923 patent, the patent official held, had suggested scanning an *optical* image; a significant difference.

Although German and British audiences had available what was essentially RCA television, in America there were still no public transmissions, largely because government and industry were both worried about the monopolistic consequences of RCA's dominance. The elaborate constraints the Americans imposed on RCA lasted until 1941, but already in 1939 Sarnoff, RCA's flamboyant founder, was chafing at the bit. For the opening of the New York World's Fair that year, RCA announced the start of service, despite the fact that the licence was only for experimental transmissions. This move made a deal with Farnsworth imperative, because the cameras intended for the Fair were to be Zworykin's latest, *Image* Iconoscopes which scanned an *electronic* image, clearly infringing Farnsworth's patent. In September 1939 the licensing agreement was signed and Zworykin published the details of his latest camera. Farnsworth's biographer claims that the RCA vice-president who signed the contract wept: it was only the second

time that the mighty Radio Corporation of America cut somebody else in on the action. It is for this victory, one would like to think, as much as anything, that Farnsworth was commemorated by the United States Post Office in 1983 with a stamp bearing the rather suspect legend 'First Television Camera'.

In its British guise, the RCA system produced 404 lines and there were fewer complaints about definition than about programme standards and repetitions. The British were happy enough with 404 lines, needing the attractions of another national network (BBC2), colour and enhanced UHF transmission before moving en masse to the slightly better defined 625-line signal in the 60s and 70s. 625 lines is still within the 30-40 lines per millimetre of the standard 16mm film stock, good enough for sharp-eyed viewers to spot continuity errors on car number plates in long shot but not as sharp as 35mm film. To translate 30-40 lines per millimetre on 35mm into television would require a 1200-line signal, just what NHK is currently proposing. The above history gives some guidance as to how quickly we are likely to have 1200-line television.

In 1924, sixteen years after he had outlined the basic solution to the puzzle of television, Campbell Swinton told the Radio Society of Great Britain: 'If we could only get one of the big research laboratories, like that of GEC or Western Electric Company... I believe they would solve a thing like this in six months and make a reasonable job of it.'

In the event, it was to take another decade before a working prototype emerged, and a further twenty years, to the early 50s, before television was widely diffused. Technical problems, as Campbell Swinton indicated, had almost nothing to do with this; and although depression and war can account for some of the delay, most was due to the operation of what might be called 'the law of the suppression of radical potential', that 'law' which governs the introduction of new technologies and ensures they do not disrupt pre-existing operations, in this case radio and film. By the time television becomes a mass medium, it is firmly owned by the radio interests and takes a great deal of its production, especially in America and as was intended from the outset, on film. Of course changes occurred, but the time scale softened their impact and reduced their scope to a minimum.

The same 'law' is at work today with HDTV—frustrating the plans of Mr Tadokoro and his colleagues—especially it would seem among the British. Thomas Robson, IBA's director of engineering, put it this way at the Montreux meeting: 'Yes, we'll have HDTV, but when? In twenty years or more the NHK system may be obsolete. It would be much better engineering practice to match the three links of production, transmission and reception more closely by using enhanced television practices.' That means improving what we have, using the same basic fifty-year-old

Alexandra Palace: a prewar production of *Anthony and Anna*.



standards but ensuring that something more like studio quality reaches the home. In this way Mr Robson and his colleagues would be kept busy but not required to do anything really drastic to their equipment.

Already the British and their partners in the European Broadcasting Union have been to Japan to see how well NHK can convert HDTV back down into the current 625-line PAL signal. Compatibility is certainly a worthwhile thing to insist on, because without it, the new system will be the property only of the information rich; but compatibility can also go a great way to suppress radical potential. It helps engineers take no notice of unwanted developments.

Two senior BBC engineers writing earlier this year in a technical journal sum up the prospects for HDTV thus: on the one hand they conceive that, 'Future HDTV signals will be used for a variety of applications and one worldwide standard should be suitable for universal applications.' On the other hand they go on, 'Signals using current tv standards can be processed in receivers to reduce unfavourable comparisons with HDTV.' But they conclude that these 'enhanced' methods, 'are not alternatives to HDTV which should be allowed to develop in a way in which the evolutionary requirements are taken into consideration but are not allowed to stifle progress.' Whatever that may mean.

So far, progress is being stifled in the usual way. NHK has been working on its



Zoetrope's Double Suicide:
the high definition camera on a crane.

system since 1970, and the world is proceeding more rationally than in the past in seeking one standard—a task infinitely complicated by the fact that the world does not have one standard for electrical supply. So far, in those secret rooms behind closed doors where telecommunications policy is made, the response to HDTV has been typical. Can it be converted? (i.e. Can I ignore it?) Can I achieve the same effect with less bother? (i.e. Will the public be satisfied with 'enhanced', that is better, tv sets?) Won't this be obsolete soon? (i.e. If we argue about it long enough, will it go away?) Is

this the only option? (Thus far the committee has dismissed an RCA enhanced system, but at Montreux the Russians announced a method specifically designed for European 50 cycle electricity. [NHK's is for US/Japanese 60 cycle juice.]

The present proposal would give the Japanese as great a stranglehold on the production side of the world's television industry (where at the moment by no means all the machinery is Japanese made) as currently they have everywhere on domestic video equipment. For that reason alone, the past history of the operation of the 'law' of suppression suggests, NHK-HDTV will have some difficulty in establishing itself worldwide. But, given our cultural addiction to realism, HDTV will no doubt come. When we have all bought stereo-sound component television, camcorders, enhanced receivers, compact VCRs and flat screen receivers, then what will they have to sell us but HDTV (and HDTV versions of all the above)?

And when that day comes, everybody will understand that the television picture and the film image can have the same resolving power, for all that the former is created out of McLuhan's 'ceaselessly forming contour of things lined by the scanning finger.' However, that day is not so close that one could not contemplate writing a doctoral dissertation (or two, even) on the inherently different perceptual processes of film and television spectatorship. ■

Tenth Hong Kong International Film Festival

March 27 — April 11, 1986



Presented by the Urban Council, Hong Kong.
Accredited by the International Federation of
Film Producers Associations

Information:

Festivals Office,
Hong Kong Coliseum Annex Building,
Parking Deck Floor, KCR Kowloon Station,
Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Telex: 38484 USDHK HX Tel.: 3-642217

Oscar winner

A day on the Bluebell Line thanks to Merchant-Ivory, who have taken over the little railway's Horsted Keynes station for a day, and one of its trains for an hour, to shoot scenes for *A Room with a View*. Little yellow MIP signs point the way through the Sussex byways to the location, which is actually not looking quite itself. So many antiquated trunks and hat-boxes have been brought in as props that most of them spend the day parked out of the way in the waiting room, keeping company with the neatly stacked station signs, which have been replaced by replicas in a more suitably Edwardian typeface. Posters and advertisements have been put up to supplement those already on the premises—no one seems quite sure whether the one saying 'Sunday Times, One Penny' belongs to the railway or the film. The props even include a couple of crates of travelling hens. One of them, mindful that she is in a Merchant-Ivory picture and that idling on set is not encouraged, is reported to have buckled to and laid an egg.

We stand in the corridor as the train jogs down its five miles of track. A couple of compartments along, Maggie Smith (Charlotte Bartlett) is being filmed gazing out of the window while the English countryside rolls by (no back projection for MIP). James Ivory comments that this will be the only real countryside in the film. In fact, one realises, there is a great deal of railway bank, possibly the most filmed in Britain, and not too much rolling country uncluttered by modern farming gear. On the return trip, the train is brought to a halt while the lens is changed. Although the shot can't be intended to run more than a few seconds on screen, we are back at Horsted Keynes before the director and camera-



Maggie Smith alighting at Horsted Keynes.

man (Tony Pierce-Roberts) are quite satisfied. Ismail Merchant prudently checks the cost (£200) and allows his director another hour of steam train later in the day as a Fourth of July present. 'You're going to be overrun by the public in a moment,' says the railway manager, who has been showing a distinct tendency to look at his watch.

In fact, some real travellers waiting for a real train prove very solicitous about keeping their baby quiet while Maggie Smith hands over her ticket and bumps, literally, into Julian Sands (George Emerson), who is encumbered with a bicycle. James Ivory complains, quietly, that the budget has run to only twelve extras, though this seems an adequate complement for a sleepy country station on a sultry summer afternoon.

Outside, we talk to the proud proprietor of a 1904 Renault, a glittering, spotlessly polished, totally beautiful museum piece. Its role is to descend the small slope from the car park to the station yard and pick up a rather grand extra, while Maggie Smith gets into her pony trap. Rather slowly, the Renault negotiates the slope, pulls up and refuses to budge. The driver cranks; the dozen extras gawp; the pony, a chestnut named Oscar, of evident spirit but impeccable professional manners, looks on with the disdain animals reserve for mechanical failure. I have just decided that if I were making this picture I would recast the Renault in a stationary role when James Ivory comes to precisely that conclusion. Maggie Smith, looking tired though game after a hot day hanging around a station in Edwardian rig, is borne away with a swish of Oscar's tail. Sooner or later, the Renault presumably bestirs itself to

make its way back to its own transport.

A Room with a View is running several days behind schedule, which must be the case with just about every picture shot on location in the damp days of this summer. It's near the end of what must have been a fairly frustrating shoot, with bad weather dogging even the first locations in Florence. The feeling among the crew, however, seems quite buoyant, even if not everyone may be entirely sure what they're filming. 'It's based on a famous play—some kind of classic, I'm told,' a small electrician tells an enquiring member of the public. Adaptation, by Ruth Jhabvala as usual, proved more of a problem, James Ivory says, than with *The Bostonians*. 'James writes in blocks, and you can build the script by choosing which to put in and which to leave out. With Forster it is all nuances and irony.' The book has been on the Merchant-Ivory slate for a number of years; it's rather surprising to realise that this is their first feature (unless *Autobiography of a Princess* should be counted a feature) to have been shot in Britain.

Observers

There is something very English, rather odd and decidedly endearing about Mass Observation. I'm not sure that is exactly the conclusion *Stranger Than Fiction*, Ian Potts' very watchable new film about Mass Observation's origins and history, would have one draw; but this is a film that certainly enjoys its subject. There has always been an irresistible comicality about the thought of those inescapably middle-class observers skulking in pubs, themselves no doubt



Julian Sands, James Ivory.



Stranger than Fiction: Humphrey Spender, Mass Observation's photographer.

avidly observed, studiously noting how long it took the proletariat to down its pint. When they moved in on Bolton, centre of their 'Worktown' study in the late 30s, it appears that they needed an interpreter before they could communicate with the natives—a humorous man, then probably as well as now, who has been found and interviewed for the film. Even better is the early observer who, in line with Mo's surrealist impulses, found himself mesmerised by a headline which somehow seems quintessentially of the 30s: 'Six Foot Typist Dead in River'.

Mass Observation dates from the Abdication. Charles Madge (poet and sociologist) and Humphrey Jennings (painter and film-maker) noted a significant gap between what people actually thought and said and the attitudes which the media (not yet so called) were ascribing to them. Tom Harrisson (anthropologist) joined them, chipping in the proceeds of a best-seller about ways of life no stranger than Bolton's. By the time of George VI's coronation, the observers were at their listening posts. And in Bolton Harrisson's foot soldiers were established in remarkably slovenly digs, setting out on daily sorties into 'Worktown', with a particular emphasis on funerals and other tribal customs.

Potts' film, scripted by himself and Angus Calder, has been backed by the BFI Production Board and Channel 4, and there's a National Film Theatre showing in October. As social history with the jokes and eccentricities left in, not to be missed. The organisation at the outset was essentially amateur: it was fuelled by curiosity about absolutely everything, and often the odder the better, rather than by the sterner and

more statistical disciplines of sociology. Humphrey Spender, its photographer, demonstrates how he took candid camera shots from beneath the cover of his raincoat—with some qualms about this distinctly sneaky proceeding. Julian Trevelyan snips away again at his collages of factory chimneys. Nina Hibbin, later to be film critic of the *Daily Worker/Morning Star*, found herself at seventeen acting as Mass Observation's unit in the East End. Celia Fremlin, the thriller writer, was one of those drafted into factories during the war to report on morale. Women war-workers, it seems, remained splendidly impervious to all the propaganda the government threw at them. Nina Hibbin recalls, in the tones of an old campaigner who would have expected nothing better, that when the observers reported that people were refusing to use surface air-raid shelters because they didn't trust their safety, the official reaction was to strengthen not the shelters but the propaganda about using them.

Mass Observation joined up for the duration, just as Humphrey Jennings moved from *Spare Time* to *Fires Were Started*. From assembling the facts that might subvert received opinion, it found itself, not entirely easily, on the side of the propaganda effort. Eventually, as was also inevitable, it became part of the advertising industry, where it still is. Potts, who from his own style of filming probably feels more sympathy for the surrealism than the MoI, suggests vague links between the first impulses of Mass Observation and the commercialised surrealism of advertising campaigns like the long-running one for Benson and Hedges.

Actually, *Stranger Than Fiction* gets a bit carried away. The mix of interviews,

30s and 40s newsreel, clips from war-time documentaries and the occasional feature (*Let George Do It* creeps in somewhere) is rich enough. But the film throws in its own untidy odds and ends of reconstruction and fantasy—an observer fighting his way through dreamlike, wildly blowing washing lines; a visit to Blackpool, with funfair and Wurlitzer and a grotesque view of a Peeping Tom observer at large on the beach; a dream sequence which includes a stunning effect of a barrage balloon crawling over the roof of a semi-detached. All this may have been fine for the film-makers to put together, but it does rather get in the way. One would like to see even more of the serious, funny, eccentric, idiosyncratic faces of Mass Observation. It's not hard to imagine almost any of them playing a bit part in a novel about the 30s—coming under the scrutiny of another shrewd observer, Nicholas Jenkins, for instance, in one of those London party scenes of *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Short Night

Poor Hitchcock. All his life, he kept his private life private and his public image jocular. He wore the dark suit and the bowler like badges of rectitude, as though the Edwardian greengrocer's son never quite forgot the greengrocer's values. How he would surely have hated the thought that two books have now raked over the dead ashes of his last years—the drinking, the pain, the cantankerousness and the advance of senility. Donald Spoto interviewed David Freeman, the last of the three screenwriters who worked on the never to be made *The Short Night*, for his biography. Now Freeman has written his own account in *The Last Days of Hitchcock* (Pavilion, £12.95), which also includes the complete script.

Freeman is good-humoured and discreet; Spoto made it all sound a lot worse. There are more well-worn Hitchcock yarns in Freeman's introductory chapter than details of the six months he spent trying to hold an old man's wandering attention and knock a script into shape. Hitchcock was 79, and although old film-makers never stop, keeping offices and projects on the go and driving secretaries mad, everyone must have known that this time there would be no film. Spoto quoted Ernest Lehman: 'I heard that Hitch had brought in a third writer to start *The Short Night* game all over again, to delude himself and the world into believing that he was still a picture-maker about to make another picture. I was terribly saddened. . .'

As to the script. On the first page, Brand, the George Blake figure, is waiting for a rope ladder to spirit him over the wall of Wormwood Scrubs—an

old-fashioned, controlled, clearly visualised Hitchcock opening. On page sixteen, Brand is doing in an uncooperative young woman in the safe house his helpers have found for him—the episode Ernest Lehman understandably jibbed at. He then disappears for most of the movie, while an American with a personal score to settle is briefed by the CIA, gets on the trail of Brand's wife in London, follows her to Finland, where she is kept under guard by two Soviet strong-arm women, falls in love with her, and waits for Brand to turn up to claim his children. The climax, aboard a train heading into Russia, involves a train to train leap that looks more Bond than Hitchcock.

'Oh, you're a right one,' says a woman in the English section, a reminder that we're in Hitchcock's archaic London. Earlier, there's a curious exchange at a Heathrow bookstall. 'I thought everyone in England was supposed to be polite,' says the American. 'Everyone in England is on strike,' snaps back the salesgirl. Is this the Winter of Discontent coming back to haunt us from a script written in 1979? Of course there are Hitchcock echoes all over the place, but it's a bare-bones sort of a script, not exactly glittering with promise after that opening sequence. Which is hardly surprising; the amazing thing, really, is that *Family Plot* was so good, even though Ernest Lehman thought it a poor thing for Hitchcock to end on.

On the move

Executive musical chairs is a game played more in Hollywood than in London. July, however, saw the announcement of some significant comings and goings here. First, Verity Lambert, who this month leaves her job as head of production at Thorn EMI, after three years, to go back to independent production. The pressure of too much publicity and expectation surrounded her appointment, as with those over-sold British sports stars who go out in the first round. Verity Lambert didn't go out in the first round; but she didn't make the semi-finals either.

At Goldcrest, the first departure announced was that of Sandy Lieberman, the amiable American production chief. Days later, James Lee, Goldcrest's chief executive, also resigned, after boardroom disagreements as to whether Lieberman should be replaced. *Screen International* suggested that James Lee 'wanted to run the company with all the power vested in his own hands' and that the majority of the board thought otherwise. Board member Sir Richard Attenborough was rapidly appointed as a confidence-restoring chairman, and it was widely reported that Jake Eberts, founder of Goldcrest's fortunes, would soon be back as chief executive.

In any event, Goldcrest had recently announced rather disappointing results for 1984 and are contemplating possible losses this year. The television division (the *First Love* series, *Robin of Sherwood*, *The Wine Programme*, etc) is being run down, or reorganised. Of the ambitious production schedule announced with the usual drumbeating last October, three pictures are now in production: *The Mission* (Puttnam/Joffé), *Absolute Beginners* (Julien Temple's film from the Colin MacInnes novel) and *Revolution*, Hugh Hudson's British-based film about the American War of Independence. For some reason, this is a notoriously dodgy movie subject, and *Revolution* is costing a great deal more than originally planned. Two of the scheduled films, *Horror Movie* and *Mandrake*, have for the time being been shelved.

Anyone looking for a depressing subject for a film thesis might consider researching how many, if any, of the grander production programmes announced by British companies have been followed through as outlined. The press conferences usually take place in rather dark restaurants in late afternoon. It was at the Goldcrest launch a year ago that some of us found ourselves remembering similar occasions, and their sequels, and wondering if Goldcrest could break the pattern. The consensus, as I remember it, among a fairly case-hardened bunch, was that a company which couldn't organise the serving of canapés until most of the guests had left might find the going sticky somewhere down the line.

The other news is the appointment of Simon Relph as chief executive of the British Screen Finance Consortium, announced in last year's White Paper and due to be set up shortly. This can't have been an easy job to fill: anyone taking it on would know that he is going to be under fire from all sides, and that it would be much worse if he had been written up as the latest in a long line of those charged with the salvation of

Simon Relph with Patsy Pollock.
Photo: Sophie Baker.



British films. Simon Relph is one of a notable generation of British producers (David Puttnam, Jeremy Thomas, Simon Perry, Mamoun Hassan, etc); his credits include *The Return of the Soldier*, *The Ploughman's Lunch* and *Wetherby*, and he is at present working on *Comrades*, Bill Douglas' picture about the Tolpuddle Martyrs. As the son of Michael Relph, he grew up in the business: it can hold few shocks for him. Is Simon Relph too nice a man for an extremely tough job? One hopes, if he won't take it amiss, that he will turn out not to be.

High tea

Visits to the Merchant-Ivory location are a reminder that an English film unit shoots on its stomach. Lunch (choice of three main courses, salads, home-made puddings, biscuits and cheese) is followed with startling rapidity by tea, which means scones and jam, cakes and a range of amazing sandwiches which include such old nursery standbys as Marmite or mashed banana. Over a full day's shooting, I am reliably informed, it is quite possible to work one's way through breakfast, a supplementary late breakfast, elevenses, lunch, tea and on occasion supper. All of which is dished out from a modest galley in the location caterer's van by a resilient staff of what seems to be no more than three. Their last assignment was *A Private Function*; no doubt they would have added the pig's requirements to their daily schedule, if asked.

Film directors, who spend most of their meal breaks planning the next set-up, can continue to look lean and hungry. Not so their colleagues. One has always understood that one of the main attractions of cruises was the opportunity for round the clock eating. The same effect can be achieved, without having to look at all that sea, by working for the movies. Or, it appears, the movies can be added to the cruise. P&O have been advertising a trip on the *Canberra*, taking in Malaga, Marseilles, Lisbon, etc, in the company of June Allyson, Ian Carmichael and Robin Ray. The stars will introduce their films and join in chat shows; Robin Ray will unearth the movie buff of the high seas; and the films on show include *Taxi Driver*, which seems an odd choice for the occasion. With or without the company of June Allyson, there will also be a lot of eating: 'five course lunch... superb buffet... full tea... late night snacks.'

KOCKENLOCKER

Taking the credit: 'PRIZZI'S HONOUR', an ABC Pictures Presentation through Producer Sales Organisation, an Embassy Home Entertainments release, distributed by Rank Film Distributors Ltd...—Rank handout.

INTO AFRICA



Leslie Woodhead on his most recent (1985) expedition.

Making the Mursi Trilogy

**Leslie
Woodhead**

I seem to have accumulated about a dozen of them now—shabby little pocket books, smelling still of woodsmoke, the scruffy pages spattered with worrying stains I can just identify as crushed insects or old mud. Now and then they look like blood. They're the diaries I've kept over the past decade of making documentaries for Granada Television. For the most part they're the unremarkable flotsam of a film-maker's wanderings, scribbled records of anguish, euphoria and discomfort, confessions of long-suppressed cockups in locations from a Chinese commune to Hugh Hefner's games room, or a Sherpa village in Nepal.

The most battered and cherished of those diaries record the making of three

films in Africa. Since the summer of 1974, I've filmed on three occasions with the Mursi, a group of cattle-herders living in quite unusual isolation on the remote southwestern edge of Ethiopia. The chance to return for a third film in the spring of this year has made it possible to complete a unique documentary serial which traces across eleven years an extraordinary story of a people living through great change. Scanning through the diaries is also for me a reminder of hilariously uncomfort-

able and exhausting days, a chastening record of the limitations of documentary film and a confirmation that the Mursi trilogy has become the most absorbing project of my life.

1974

It all began for me in June 1974. After years of chasing guilty men for *World in Action*, Brian Moser's offer of a film for the new *Disappearing World* series about bush democracy in Ethiopia was appealing in prospect. The reality proved disarmingly tough, involving 150 miles of walking through a tribal war and a vivid bout of malaria. It was also consumingly interesting.

Disappearing World's central ambition has always been to try to make films which would have relevance both for a peak-time rrv audience and for academic anthropologists. We have been convinced from the start that the only hope of achieving this is to work with sympathetic anthropologists who know the people well, speak the language and can provide a crucial link to the film-makers. Here I got lucky. I first met Dr David Turton of Manchester University not on our shared home ground in the north of England but in Addis Ababa during a frantic few hours gathering pots and paraffin and permissions before we headed off for the wilderness. Our relationship was forged over the next few awful days as we struggled to reach the Mursi on an expedition of unqualified raggedness. Without Turton, we'd simply never have got there.

The 5,000 Mursi live in the lower Omo Valley, one of the most inaccessible places in Africa, close to where Ethiopia meets Kenya and the Sudan. It has been suggested that the Omo Valley may be the birthplace of humanity, and to this day Mursi country is a very tough place to get at. Hemmed in by mountains and by the Omo, one of Africa's great rivers, in 1974 the Mursi had barely heard of Ethiopia, still less of Africa. David Turton's visits since 1968 had been virtually their only contact with the outside world. The logistics of reaching the Mursi with a film team of four—cameraman, sound recordist, researcher and me—plus Turton and all our equipment, food and provisions for five weeks were clearly daunting, but we reckoned we had a plan. Our researcher, André Singer, had managed to hire a dodgy-looking Volkswagen jeep in Addis and we hoped to fly it to a grass strip some forty miles north of Mursi country and then drive through the trackless bush to our location.

Rereading the diary record of what actually happened is still dismaying and very funny. At the time it was simply desperate. After risking the destruction of the thirty-year-old Dakota with our bulky jeep, our transport promptly and repeatedly gave up the ghost in the unforgiving bush. Within forty-eight hours, our little group was spread over miles of scorched wilderness, food and tents and snake gaiters scattered in four separate campsites as we struggled to rebuild the jeep's shattered suspension for a second time. To add to all this, we were attempting to pass through the territory of the Bodi, who were in the midst of a disastrous war with their neighbours and our subjects, the Mursi. Stranded in yet another hopeless campsite, I noted in my diary: 'Cartoon strip vultures watch us from a tree. I watch the ants scurrying on our tent hem and wonder how we're ever going to get there.' But somehow we did. Turton was terrific, tirelessly patient with the stumbling film-makers and sensitive to bush politics as he hired Victorian-scaled hordes of porters to carry our piles of equipment after the decease of the jeep.



The dead jeep in the unforgiving bush.

In the midst of it all, we fumbled to try to record on film what was happening between the Mursi and the Bodi. Our tidy intentions had been to make a film about the Mursi's remarkable public debating process, a sophisticated and striking example of bush democracy by which the leaderless Mursi resolve all problems of importance to the society. In confused reality, we were compelled to follow on film the issues of war and peace-making as we found them. For a film-maker accustomed to the recipes and formalities of current affairs documentary, backed by research and hampered by the *World in Action* house style, it was a novel and worrying business, feeling for a shape and a film in the confused guts of totally unfamiliar and unpredictable events. As we tottered between half a dozen campsites trying to follow what was happening, I noted: 'Now the problems really bite and the decisions press—where to go and what to do as the time begins to drain away. We perm possibilities and even look up phases of the moon.'

David Turton's unease as he encountered our previously unexamined documentary methods was revealing for me. He winced as we initially wallowed around trying to re-order the messy realities of life in the lower Omo to fit our urban film grammar, and his discomforts compelled us to find other ways. Crouching in the bush, we recorded Turton's comments and interpretations on what we were filming each day to be used eventually as a parallel narration for the film.

The total fluidity of events inevitably forced us to modify our shooting styles, abandoning set-ups and attempts to control sequences in favour of long takes and unintrusive observation. All of us working on *Disappearing World* in the mid-70s were impressed by the observational approach to ethnographic documentary demonstrated by David and Judith MacDougall in *To Live with*

Herds. MacDougall had described his effort to 'Pierce through the individualistic reconstructions of reality that once characterised documentary film style in order to bring audiences close to events as independent witnesses.' *Disappearing World* pioneered on British television the thorough-going use of subtitles, like MacDougall, to allow our subjects to speak directly to the audience without the intervention of an interpreting English voice.

The insistence on subtitling inevitably had a special relevance to a film like *The Mursi*, which was so concerned with talk. And the observational method inevitably shifted crucially my relationship as film-maker with anthropologist David Turton. Lacking the trained anthropological background of some of my *Disappearing World* colleagues, for me the business of reconciling our roles as film-maker and anthropologist was more taxing. I wrote in the diary: 'It's an odd way to direct a movie, but that's the way it has to be. I confess I think the only way to do it is to change the habits of a decade. I'll just have to work closely with David or an inferior film is going to result. I simply can't know enough about what we've shot, especially given the vital importance of talk in this film. I can see no other way to get it right. In the end, it would be hard indeed to untangle what my contribution will have been to this extraordinary escapade.'

In fact the diaries reveal a basic truth; that the filming becomes almost incidental alongside the daily business of keeping afloat amid the turbulence of exotic problems: a snake in the sleeping bag, the ceaseless labour of water purification, the utterly unexpected uproar. 'Colossal din of life on this river site, frogs rev up like speedway bikes... lions roar in the distance as we drift off to sleep.' Another day begins: 'Lying in the tent with madly itching, peeling back, the tiresome unsatisfactory

routines of the morning ahead, then the walk. Fed up with feeling tatty, longing for order and home.'

Through it all, the Mursi remained unaccountably tolerant of our bewildering intrusions. We had one ghastly moment when a young brave walked out of the bush wearing seven rolls of our exposed negative wrapped around him as body decoration. But for the most part, they were patient and unconcerned as we pursued our strange obsessions with our useless burdens of technology. They also proved consistently poised and articulate in talking to our camera about their lives and the current crisis. I wondered during that first film whether their striking unselfconsciousness was a consequence of what Richard Leacock has identified as a crucial ingredient in successful observational film—that what people are doing is more important to them than the fact of being filmed. I was to find during later films with the Mursi that they were equally poised as camera witnesses even when the war crisis had passed. They were also compassionate about our laughable awkwardness in coping with the rigours of life in the bush and those endless punishing treks, hobbling overweight across the harsh landscape they occupy with such grace.

The diary is littered with wretched little cameos of our inelegant wanderings: 'A dismal end to a dreary afternoon, back in camp after a soaking trudge from the ridge. Back over the same ground for the fourth time today, shirt plastered to me, trousers soggy, boots soled with mud. I seem to snag on every thorn bush. Finally back to dripping camp. Paraffin from the lamp has spilled over the floor of our crammed tent. A damp, dirty Mursi dog sprawls on the site and sums it all up.'

In the end, we shot almost a third of what became the completed first film in

a single astonishing morning. After all the frustrations and hourly changes of plan, everything came together on a ridge overlooking the Omo in an overwhelming sequence of ceremony and debate as the Mursi gathered around their priest in an act of solidarity as the war crisis deepened. In the diary, I noted: 'Breakthrough—we have a film. Stunning day on the ridge, thirteen rolls of what we came for—nonstop sweat but euphoria. We all smile and feel good. Now of course a new set of problems begins. How to get out?'

Getting out involved another trek behind thirty porters to rejoin our stranded researcher, who had spent the previous two weeks alone guarding our expired jeep 25 miles north of where we were shooting the film. We'd been worried about André for some days as notes kept arriving from him carried by Mursi messengers, full of alarming stories of shootouts close to his camp and signed 'Robinson Crusoe'. When we staggered to rejoin him, it was to discover a campsite of neurotic tidiness, right-angled rope enclosures and a shining jeep. But inevitably, all the cossetting was in vain. The jeep was revived for a final splutter through the 12-foot grass and then gave up for good. We were compelled to walk away from it and retrace our weary steps back to the strip and longed-for rendezvous with a geriatric Dakota. Back in England, three of us found we had malaria.

1982

1982 was easier. With the agonies of that first film deadened by the passage of eight years, David Turton and I had been discussing for some time the prospect of another film in the lower Omo. This time we wanted to look at the

Mursi's relationship of domination over a much smaller group who live along the Omo, the Kwegu. Having survived his ordeal as jeep-watcher, André Singer was now series editor of *Disappearing World*, and his plan for a batch of African films gave us a chance to return to Mursi country.

This was to be a river-based film, which inevitably posed new logistical problems. In place of the burdensome jeep, we had a bright red inflatable dinghy with an outboard motor, hired in Addis by researcher Andy Harries from an expatriate British engineer called Ron. Ron came from Oldham and dazzled the Addis Hilton by arriving in the bar to meet us wearing a lounge suit and Wellington boots. His dinghy was to prove of sterner stuff than the luckless jeep. Most vital of all, we now had the assistance of Mohammed Idris from the Ethiopian Ministry of Information and National Guidance.

While we were making that first Mursi film, Ethiopia's revolution had been brewing in Addis. By the time of our second film, the Revolutionary government was taking an increasing interest in its remote people and Mohammed instantly solved our major problem of how to get there. He arranged for us to charter an Ethiopian army helicopter, and those weeks of wallowing through the bush of 1974 were swept away in an unforgettable three hours. The dapper helicopter crew had never flown over the lower Omo and the closing stages of our approach had to be navigated with the aid of aerial-survey photos and David Turton's single map with its alarming place names like 'Plain of Death'. Skimming low along the Omo scattering wildlife, we landed on a baking shingle beach in what felt like an amateur rerun of Apollo II's arrival at Tranquillity Base. Piling out

Writing the diary, January 1982.

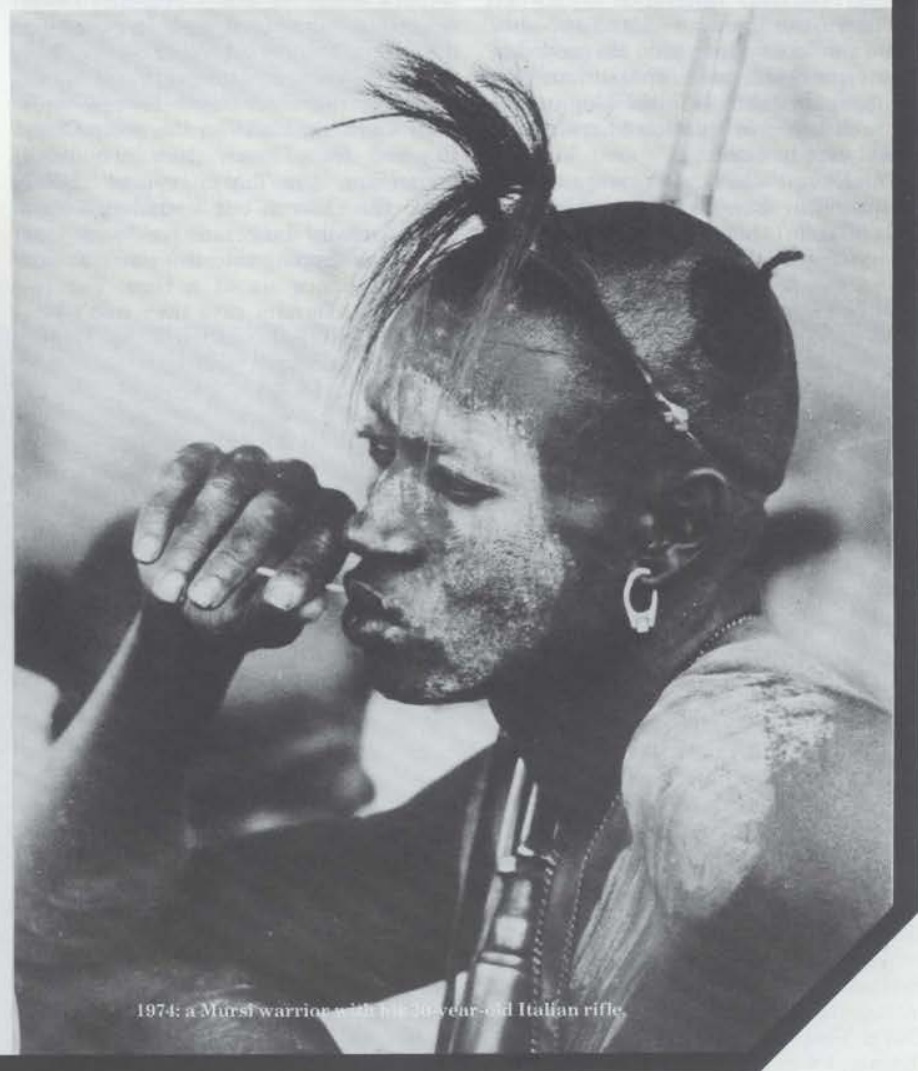


INTO AFRICA





'Television's newest audience': the Mursi watch the films about themselves.



1974: a Mursi warrior with his 30-year-old Italian rifle.



Anthropologist David Turton: 1982.

with our mountains of gear was more like an episode from Victorian exploration, Mursi striding from the bush alongside the river to greet David Turton. Heaving a box out of the helicopter, I heard my name and turned to find Ulikoro, whom I'd last seen eight years before with his father's cattle.

As the helicopter disappeared along the Omo, trailing our pleas to return for us a month later, we were also relieved to find Darchu. Darchu is a Kwegu whom Turton knows well and hoped to make the focus of our film. He proved to be a remarkable man, charismatic and intelligent, vital both to the film and for our well being in relation to crocodiles, as we were to discover.

The Kwegu was in many ways a more elusive film than our documentary of 1974. While that was essentially an observational piece, attempting to record the flow of events as the Mursi debated issues of war and peace-making, our task in 1982 was to try to articulate a relationship. Discovering filmable situations to express the complex symbiotic relationship between the dominated Kwegu and their Mursi patrons was a taxing business, involving days of debate between Turton and myself as we struggled to understand the nature of the relationship and how to show it on film. Our difficulties were a vivid illustration of what every documentary maker knows about the unresponsiveness of film in dealing with ideas, for all its power in the communication of feeling.

Once again, the quality of Darchu was crucial in helping to resolve our problems. Filming him as he expertly plumbed the dangerous Omo in search of a Mursi rifle or set a deer trap, we were able to gather vivid practical instances of Kwegu services. At the end of our stay, we filmed a lengthy interview with Darchu in a secluded place where he could speak freely about his situation. Setting these ingredients alongside an interpretative narration recorded with David Turton back in Manchester after filming, I was able to attempt to offer on

film an account of the elusive Kwegu/Mursi relationship.

Meanwhile there were the crocodiles. When David Turton had mentioned them in Manchester, I'd shrugged off the prospect as a distant sighting of a soporific log. The reality was genuinely alarming, squadrons of 20-foot monsters slipping off the shingle as we spluttered past in our ludicrously vulnerable inflatable. We had suffered an early setback when we lost a propeller blade against a submerged rock in sprinting from one interested reptile. But the dinghy remained essential transport in pursuing the river-based Kwegu with their canoeing skills on the risky Omo. Rescued from more than one river immersion, the diary reports: 'Miles down the Omo in our wounded rubber boat. A really dangerous feel, with vast crocodiles slipping into the water at our approach, once six at a time. For reassurance, Darchu says they won't bite the boat, only eat us if we fall in. To add to the excitement, the boat is visibly deflating under us.'

As in 1974, I was utterly dependent on David Turton to interpret what was happening around us and to help me understand the complex exchange of services between Mursi and Kwegu, which seemed to allow both groups to feel they were gaining from what seemed to us a grossly unequal relationship. And as in 1974, my diary recorded the miseries and the ecstasies: 'A moment to count the bites on my hands—14 on the left, 22 on the right... an absolute ecstasy of physical discomfort, soaking wet boots, itching limbs... Down the river on a perfect afternoon, glassy water, exquisite light. Baboons stare at us from the bank. It's like floating in a dream... Written by moonlight—an utterly indescribable evening. Dazzling moon, elegant silhouettes all round, rim-lit in silver, girls dancing and singing, us eating spacefood out of a metal bag while Andy listens to English football on the world service. Words run out of traction in such a place on such a night.' Or as a Mursi said to

David seeing me scribbling yet again: 'White people are always preoccupied with paper.'

And again, I was driven to dismantle assumptions beyond those about film-making. Turton revealed a Mursi multiplication table: 5 bullets = 1 goat, 24 goats = 1 cow, 4 cows = 1 rifle. Darchu offered me four cows for my daughter. On one memorable morning, Turton provided Mursi children, whose parents make no written or representational images, with crayons and paper. Asked to draw a man, one boy produced a mass of squiggles and then revealed this was body decoration and the paper was the man. I was reminded of an occasion during the first film where a group of Mursi men, quite unacquainted with two-dimensional images, tried to push their fingers through the surface of a photograph and held a postcard of Asmara with the horizon running vertically—a startling lesson in the fluidity of perception.

1985

In the diary of the 1982 film, I wrote: 'I feel increasingly the pull of a third film in a few years time when the patterns of change are more evolved.' This was a response to what we had been hearing from several of our Mursi visitors about a major migration by almost a quarter of the population to a new home some fifty miles to the east. It seemed that, driven by the terrible drought and hunger of the late 70s, more than a thousand Mursi had embarked on the hazardous migration to higher land in the valley of the Mago River, as they put it 'in search of cool ground' with better rainfall and the prospect of better harvests. As our relieving helicopter hauled us out of Mursi country, we asked the pilot to fly over the Mago area in search of the migrants. Finally we spotted them on a bare hillside, an extraordinary cluster of some two hundred huts massed together in a defensive compound. Clearly visible on the horizon was smoke from the nearby highland village of Berka—an outpost of modern Ethiopia. We circled and filmed, storing the image of migration and change for the next three years.

In April 1985, I again found myself tumbling out of an Ethiopian army helicopter in the very green Mago Valley, and immediately surrounded by old acquaintances. Komorakora, the Mursi priest who had sustained them in time of war during our 1974 filming and is now a key figure in legitimising the migration, was among the crowd of people who watched our arrival in the long grass of our landing site. The luxuriance of the foliage was a vivid indication of how the 'cool ground' of the Mago Valley seems likely to deliver a good harvest this year. But it also alerted us to a lot of hard going.

It has probably been the toughest of the three films to make, calling for some 200 miles of supremely uncomfortable walking at the height of a spectacularly wet season. The latest diary is stained by

more evidence of mud and downpour than the other two combined. It also records the daily battles with polythene bags, condensation, beetles in the viewfinder and unscheduled river immersions gamely joined by cameraman Mike Blakely and sound recordist David Woods in defence of their hard-pressed film gear. Blakely even helped me out with supping a barrel of blood to preserve our credibility as guests. Woods, a former biology student, wisely declined. But through the now familiar exotic surface, the themes of abrupt change and increasing contact with the outside world have proved rich and complex.

That smudge of smoke signalling the outpost of modern Ethiopia we had seen from the helicopter three years earlier proved to be the location for a quite remarkable scene. Heaving up 4,000 ft from the Mago to the village of Berka, we were able to record Mursi doing business with the cash economy at the teeming Saturday market which has suddenly become a vital feature of their lives. Hagglng with sharp highland traders and often getting the better of them, indulging a fondness for unimagined luxuries like salt while an Ethiopian policeman with a rifle prowls watchfully through the crowd, the Mursi were in a quite new situation. They weren't however too preoccupied to forget the requirements of the bedraggled but ever-present film-makers. Turton overheard the film-wise Mursi instructing the highland villagers in how to behave for the camera, not looking into the lens and keeping on with whatever they were doing as naturally as possible. It seems the corruptions of the documentary process follow us and reshape the environment however remote. Back at base camp after a swinish slither down the mud shoots from Berka in torrential rain, I noted: 'So after a barmy but unforgettable 48 hours we've trailed 50 miles, gone up and down 4,000 ft, survived and probably made 1½ minutes of screen time.' On the editing machine now, it looks more like 2 minutes.

We also made a hundred-mile round hike back to the traditional Mursi heartlands in the Omo Valley, where we got the perspective of people who haven't made the migration. They are convinced that the Mago Mursi will lose their cattle to the tsetse flies which infest the new area and so lose their vital identity. From what we saw of the priest's tsetse-ravaged cattle in the Mago, it seems to be true. The Mursi hope that they can protect their cattle with serums bought illegally in the highland villages is a tragic delusion. The drugs will merely breed resistant strains of the parasite and hasten the death of the cattle and a way of life—a cruel instance of the ambiguities of increasing contact.

We at last managed to attend to a serious weakness in the two earlier films by exploring the role of Mursi women and seeing how it's changing in their new home. Previous attempts to film with women had ended in an impasse of embarrassment and non-communication; largely, Turton and I both felt, because we'd failed to discover an appropriate filming context. This time, by careful preparation and by the use of radio mikes and long lenses to minimise our intrusion, we have gathered worthwhile and revealing material with Mursi women about how they see their lives. We heard how some women are beginning to respond to the Ethiopian government's urging not to cut their lips in the traditional way, and we also saw how their key role in dealing with Berka market is giving them a new independence and economic power. But as ever in making these films, our easy assumptions were tipped sideways and I remember with particular sharpness one Mursi woman laughing with derision at Turton's revelation that he shared the cooking at home—no job for a warrior male, it seems.

We saw how, even in their more fertile new home, it remains a supremely tough life for the Mursi. Our medical kit and scanty expertise were daily hard pressed by victims of snakebite, horrifying tropical ulcers, infant malnutrition and

unidentifiable illness. The film also contains evidence of how unforgiving the new environment can still be. We followed the developing situation after the discovery of Army Worm in the Mago crops, through public discussions about what to do, a crop purification ritual and finally a visit by a delegation to Jinka, the nearest outpost of government, to request aid. The spokesman for the Mursi was Nyomaniali, now appointed Chairman of the Mago Valley Farmers' Association, a grass roots official of the Revolutionary regime.

The whole incident was a vivid demonstration of how far the Mursi have moved towards the outside world in the decade since we first filmed with them. And our most recent filming was rich with other indications of change. The Kwegu, Darchu, came to see us from his home at the Omo with stories of seeing occasional camera-wielding tourists and hearing from game guards plans for a ferry across the river. The government official responsible for the area told us of larger plans to resettle the Mursi elsewhere, urging them to stop their nomadic wanderings and profit by development. It seems their territory is designated as a national park, a place for wildlife and tourists.

But with our cameras and recorders, our rock cassettes and piles of equipment, *Yes, Minister* and news of Arthur Scargill on our World Service radios, we are of course part of the process of change. That was most inescapably clear as we set up David Turton's little television in a riverside forest to screen the two earlier films for an audience of two hundred Mursi. It's a scene I shall always remember, and as television's newest audience looked at themselves in time of war eleven years earlier, it brought our trilogy to some kind of resolution.

For David Turton, the period covered by the films and the shifts in the Mursi during those years has suggested a larger pattern in their historic search for Cool Ground which the trilogy will explore. For the Mursi, that first experience of television seems to have been received with casual resilience. After some unease about how we'd made people now dead walk and talk on the tv, they weren't really all that interested. As Turton says, 'It would be hard to imagine anything more totally irrelevant to the Mursi than television.' You couldn't, after all, eat it or tie your bull up with it. It was a useful reminder of priorities for film-makers, but not finally totally chastening. One man told Turton that it was good to have a record of their way of life to teach the children now that so much is changing.

Yes, of course, I'm already thinking about one more film with the Mursi. I scribbled an unconscious prophecy of my own obsession on the first page of that first diary in 1974: 'No one lives in Ethiopia. They simply fail to leave.' ■

In Search of Cool Ground, The Mursi Trilogy will be transmitted on the rrv network on October 14, 15 and 16.



The film unit in the Mago Valley: 1985.

TIME MARCHES ON!

MAX HASTINGS on an American Institution

Almost everybody knows the style of *The March of Time*, because almost everybody has seen *Citizen Kane*. Orson Welles' newsreel pastiche in the opening sequence stole nearly every trick in *MOT*'s repertoire: the stentorian ringmaster's voice that sounds as if it is auctioning the commentary rather than reading it; the brash script; the gleeful Bible Belt relish for human folly.

By 1941, when *Citizen Kane* reached the cinemas, *March of Time* was an American national institution; indeed it was a worldwide one reaching 7,300 cinemas in the United States and 1,200 overseas, 30 million people with each monthly edition, until the war began to strangle its outlets. The series died in 1951, beached by a new age and a new mood. Yet in the 200 episodes following its creation in 1935, it pioneered a concept of newsreel journalism: aggressive, politically committed, socially aware. It is these qualities which have provoked Channel 4 to produce a series of ten programmes, made by Flashback Television Ltd, for screening this autumn, illustrating and analysing the great days of *March of Time*, based upon extracts from the newsreels and interviews with their surviving creators.

Just as *Picture Post* was born of an unlikely alliance between the proprietor Edward Hulton and the erratic genius Stefan Lorant, so *MOT* owed its existence to the marriage of *Time* magazine's

formidable young general manager Roy Larsen, and the producer Louis de Rochemont. The son of a newspaperman, born in Boston in 1899 and a graduate of Harvard, Larsen joined Henry Luce at *Time* in 1922 as circulation manager. By the end of the decade, he had made the magazine a huge financial success, and become its second largest stockholder.

In 1931, Larsen devised a radio programme, *The March of Time*, which featured dramatic sketches based upon the week's news, performed by actors. He took his title from a Harold Arlen song of the same name, originally written for a Broadway production of Earl Carroll's *Vanities*. The song also provided the opening 'logo' music. Larsen was much less interested in pioneering a new medium of journalism than in using radio to promote sales of *Time* magazine. In the first year, the series featured such subjects as Gandhi's campaign of civil disobedience, the Devil's Island penal colony, the shooting of 'Legs' Diamond, the fall of Mukden to the Japanese.

This was an age in which news from abroad still possessed an exotic strangeness and excitement for American and European audiences, which the newsreel *March of Time* would exploit to the full. Neither critics nor audience questioned the ethics of contemporary 'faction', fabricating dialogue to be inserted into the mouths of the mighty and famous,

represented by actors, and alleged to approximate to their real thoughts and statements. The series was hailed as gripping radio drama, survived in various forms until 1945, and did much to promote *Time* magazine at tolerable financial cost to the organisation.

At an early stage, Larsen became excited by the notion of translating *March of Time* into cinema. American newsreel in the 1930s matched the bromide quality of American television half a century later. It sought neither to inform nor to surprise, but merely to entertain through a series of brief glimpses of what passed for reality. In 1934, Larsen met Louis de Rochemont, a 35-year-old Boston attorney's son who had served for six years as a naval officer before becoming a movie-maker.

De Rochemont was much attracted by *March of Time* because he himself had already been experimenting with dramatic re-creations of factual events at Columbia. He believed passionately that newsreel could do more to inform the public about the world in which it lived. A difficult, temperamental, slave-driving tyrant, he was also a magician with film who lived for his work. The inspired partnership of Larsen and de Rochemont made possible *March of Time*.

The first 22-minute issue was premiered in the United States on 1 February 1935. It included sequences on the political power struggle in Japan; the methods by which New York's legendary '21' Club had escaped prosecution during Prohibition; and the controversy in Britain surrounding Leslie Hore-Belisha's efforts to introduce traffic lights, bitterly resisted by motorists. The Japanese sequence relied chiefly on newsreel stock shots—Larsen had bought second rights to the Fox Movietone archive. All the other items, however, were built around re-creations either by actors or by the real principals, persuaded to act out events from their memory for the camera. The producers found Hore-Belisha's voice 'indistinct and too English', and dubbed in a New York actor's voice reading his words.

The critics generally welcomed the new concept. Alastair Cooke wrote in *The Listener*: 'There are papers, and in

Reconstruction: a *March of Time* office boy as Haile Selassie.



a fainter way documentary films, that are intelligent. There are some that are energetic. There are some that are aloof. It has been left to *Time*, and now *The March of Time* to combine, for the first time in journalism, intelligence, energy, and aloofness.' In the months that followed, *MOT* covered the rise of Hitler, Huey Long's tyranny in Louisiana, Sir Basil Zaharoff 'the dealer in death', the Abyssinian crisis, many aspects of the New Deal.

The style of *MOT* was set. Whatever *Time* magazine's Republican prejudices, de Rochemont's crew were unmistakably liberal Democrats—bitterly hostile to fascism, naively enthusiastic about the new Russia, deeply interested in social issues. De Rochemont was a superb journalist, with a remarkable instinct for places and faces that were making news, or about to. He lavished money and resources on projects he believed in—up to \$75,000 on a single issue—and Larsen supported him even when other *Time* executives were much alarmed by *MOT*'s budgets. De Rochemont worked himself and his team day and night, seven days a week, and not all of them relished the sweatshop atmosphere he created.

De Rochemont himself had been a specialist in the newsreel scoop business since, as a 16-year-old cameraman in Portland, Maine, he persuaded both the local sheriff and a saboteur in his cells to re-enact the moment of the man's arrest a few hours earlier. His crews at *March of Time* became experts in the snatched shot—of Zaharoff, of France's official guillotinish, of a procession of celebrities and men on the run.

But in those innocent days, de Rochemont's cameramen went far beyond snatching intimate shots of the famous: where these were not to be had—which was most of the time—they simply invented them. In the vintage years of *MOT*, the world's leaders from King Zog of Albania to Hitler, Trujillo and Emperor Haile Selassie were dressed up and filmed in the midst of New York City, with either actors or handy extras dragoned to take the roles—an *MOT* office boy played the ruler of Abyssinia. The home-brewed shots



Louis de Rochemont.

were intercut with the authentic location footage into a seamless garment—in the screened footage, not a hint was given to the audience of where reality ended and theatre, sometimes preposterous, took over; though *MOT* freely admitted, indeed boasted in publicity, of its employment of re-creation as a technique.

A modern documentary-maker, or at least a more sophisticated modern audience, might wax indignant at the fraud thus perpetrated upon them. De Rochemont in his own day sought to cover himself from any charge on this score by declaring that he was in the business of pictorial journalism—whatever that might be—rather than documentary-making. No doubt he considered the brand of theatrical pizzazz he peddled no more pernicious than the fantasies and fabrications that were the staple fare of newspapers of the time. He declared that re-enactments were 'frequently sharper and more detailed than "the real thing".'

The simple truth was that for men working with 70lb cameras in an age in which handholding was unthinkable, the possibility of authentic 'intimate' footage was non-existent. It is important to measure the shortcomings of de Rochemont's technique against those of today's alleged 'actuality' television

footage. The rare moments when television gains genuinely unguarded images of human behaviour are almost always those when the subjects are under such extreme stress that they are too preoccupied to notice the camera—most notably, in war. For the most part, however, factual documentaries on television remain—as they always must—the fruits of painstaking re-creation by the participants, of a sophistication de Rochemont could never dream of.

For a television profile of a politician today, the real-life subject can be asked to enter his own kitchen on cue, sit down and pause for the cutaway between orange juice and cornflakes, talk to camera with an apparent naturalness de Rochemont's subjects could never aspire to. But not infrequently, this gives the 'pictorial journalism' of 1985 an authenticity that is wholly spurious. The camera today may be incomparably handier than that of 1935, but the impact of its presence is no less distorting upon reality. It is worth noticing how much archive film of the two world wars, some of it regarded as classic action footage, was in reality staged behind the lines for the camera, a practice that remains not infrequent today.

March of Time sought to be the equivalent of a modern current affairs programme—reflective and discursive—rather than an up-to-the-minute newsreel. Often it was as ham and brash as Hollywood feature films of the period, for example a 1936 item looking forward to the British Coronation. The music left no cliché unstoned. Elgar boomed over the tourist images of London. A series of specially shot cameos revealed alleged British attitudes to the great occasion. 'Suppose there's a fog?' demands an imperious American voice. 'We do not anticipate any fog, miss,' declares a stage English one. 'What are you doing for the Coronation?' an off-camera voice asks a painted cockney female, who leers horribly at the lens and replies: 'Well, I'm expecting some nice friends from abroad, dear.'

There is a splendid sequence of a pseudo-peer practising putting on his robes and demanding of the stately shop

The *March of Time* logo.



1937. The coal industry in Britain: breakaway union.



assistant: 'What about the sword?' 'Perhaps you'd like to take it home and practise with it?' 'Perhaps that's a good idea.' There are street musicians, cavalry in training; an unexplained and—for this writer—disconcerting glimpse of my own father making some comment about the occasion.

For those who wish to promote *March of Time* as a serious cultural force, it does no harm to focus upon an item like this, which presents a frankly Lerner and Loewe view of England. To be sure, MOT got into trouble with the British censors for trying to Tell All about Edward VIII and Mrs Simpson, and generally being too forthcoming about the Abdication. But so did even the tackiest of transatlantic romance magazines in 1936. Likewise MOT's profile of King Zog of Albania, which declared his country 'the finest piece of colonial plunder left in Europe,' is good, clean knockabout stuff, but it is scarcely deathless cinema.

Henry Luce's well-known passion for China compelled *March of Time* to make frequent items about that country, and about its leader Chiang Kai-Shek, 'the greatest man in China's modern history,' as one commentary branded him. The same story highlighted the neon-lit capitalist splendours of Shanghai, and showed the new breed of Chinese worker on a factory production line turning out cigarettes, 'the luxuries of the labouring classes,' as the script described them indulgently. It was always claimed that Louis de Rochemont took his holidays when the order came down for a film about China.

This item, like so many other MOT foreign stories, revealed a tabloid ignorance and insensitivity about the world among the film-makers. Even after an MOT London office was opened, and a Paris bureau created under de Rochemont's brother Richard, there remained little sophistication about European coverage. A grotesque story on Soviet Russia, featuring bought-in and embarrassingly faked footage of happy Moscow housewives shopping in streets stacked high with goods, emphasised the political hopes and fantasies of the scriptwriters in New York.

Not surprisingly MOT was on far stronger factual ground, and built its reputation, with its hard-hitting domestic American stories. De Rochemont stirred a nationwide ferment with his profile of Dixie dictator Huey Long, of whom his scriptwriters declared, 'Huey boasts that back in Louisiana he has the best legislature money can buy.' Long established motion picture censorship in his state to suppress that edition of the newsreel. Over the years, de Rochemont and his team came to wear their frequent local and foreign bans and cuts like medals of honour.

After Long's death, MOT made a memorable story on Gerald Smith, one of his fascist henchmen then touring the United States rousing rabbles to the cause of intolerance. De Rochemont's team was able to exploit the public naiveté that still persisted about what film could do, persuading Smith to act out superbly grotesque sequences for them. He practised his oratory before a mirror in a parody worthy of Arturo Ui, he delivered his anti-communist diatribes so that MOT's writers could claim: 'In Gerald Smith, serious commentators see the making of a fascist dictator.'

In the legal uproar that followed screening of that item, Smith's lawyers sought to attack MOT's well-known chicanery in producing re-creations. They suggested that the director might have asked Smith's audience, 'How many of you want coffee?', then filmed the massed fascist salute when he got the answer. Smith lost, but his lawyers had a point. Not a few movie critics pointed out how dangerous and distorting MOT's techniques could be in unprincipled hands.

President Trujillo of the Dominican Republic suffered grievously at the hands of MOT's creators, who staged re-creations of the great man worthy of a *Carry On* film, and declared him uncompromisingly 'the dictatingest dictator who ever dictated.'

If this seems crude stuff today, MOT's unblushing denunciations of charlatans and criminals are seen to great advantage alongside the feeble equivocations of many modern scriptwriters. The concept of 'balance' in broadcasting

may now protect some honest men from injustice, but it has also saved many crooks from castigation. I remember a row in my own experience, when a BBC current affairs editor insisted upon the toning-down of a film commentary about a disgraced tycoon who was undoubtedly fortunate to have escaped imprisonment. The lawyers had passed our film. But under bombastic pressure from the tycoon concerned, the editor declared that we must moderate the commentary tone, to be 'fair' to him.

An embittered journalist who witnessed the row remarked to me that one could speculate on the editor's attitude to a lobby of flat-earthers: 'He would agree that the earth was not flat, but would feel that in the interests of fairness we should concede that perhaps it might be flat some of the time.' *March of Time* could not be charged with lack of courage, or equivocation. They put their mouths, or rather the inimitable voice of Westbrook Van Voorhis, where their money was.

A few MOT films were specially shot for British distribution—though even these were scripted in New York. One tough story featured the declining coal-mining industry of Britain, and the Nottinghamshire miners' controversy about a breakaway union. As always with MOT films, shots were ruthlessly short—an average of 6.04 feet or four seconds through the entire series. Everything was shot from a tripod. Panning and zooming were strictly forbidden, because such shots were almost impossible for New York to cut down to their own length. Out-takes were religiously preserved for the stockshot library, a practice that could be maintained with advantage in television today.

March of Time's vague general view of socialism as A Good Thing came through loud and clear in another British item, concerning the decline of the aristocracy. A peer is seen moaning to his butler about death duties. Over a shot of an estate broken up and sold, the commentary explains comfortably that 'where a single family once held sway, a hundred now make their homes.' Stately homes that have been turned into

1937. War in China: Chiang Kai-Shek, his wife and adviser.



1937. Spanish Civil War: government recruits in Madrid.



schools 'now bring new vitality to empty acres.'

There is a priceless sync exchange between two apparently bona fide peers about their need to find employment in these bourgeois times: 'My dear Stanley,' says one, mouthing his lines with painful deliberation, 'there's no room in this country for non-producers, titled or not. If a fellow can't preserve his position without upsetting the entire show, I think he deserves to go.'

March of Time never, of course, employed interviewers. All voice takes were either statements to camera or to audiences by politicians and suchlike, or contrived and scripted dialogues between two people. The same faces of 'the common man' recurred, two of them cropping up, for instance, in one film discussing the shortcoming of nutrition in British children, and a few issues later speculating about the Coronation.

Unlike most film-makers then and now, who sculpt words to pictures, de Rochemont prided himself on giving his scripts equal importance with the pictures. One of the merits of his recreations, he claimed, was that they gave him more flexibility in finding suitable images to illustrate his writers' words.

By the standards of that or any other time, the resources at his command were remarkable, a tribute to *Time* magazine's commitment to the series. For a profile of Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York, he could lay on four cameras. By 1939, *MOT* possessed a permanent staff of 58, and few of them were under-worked. De Rochemont himself was a workaholic who clocked up a staggering 86 continuous hours in the cutting room in one notable week in 1937, and expected the same dedication from his staff, many of whom were very poorly paid. Technical crews in those days were visibly more committed to their product than most of their counterparts today.

March of Time's most celebrated commitment to principle stemmed from its denunciations of the fascist dictators. Here, the newsreel's anti-Nazi policy marched with that of the magazine. One of *MOT*'s most notable films about the menace of Hitler's Germany was made

with footage de Rochemont was told had been 'smuggled past the Nazi censors, but later learned had been shot as propaganda material with the approval of Goebbels' ministry.

This scarcely mattered. *MOT* dubbed its own savage commentary and added some re-creations of stormtroopers pasting up anti-semitic leaflets and canvassing for funds. The end product, oddly enough, was believed by some critics to be pro-Nazi. But most viewers were in no doubt. The Chicago police Board of Censors banned the story because 'it contained material likely to cause public ill feelings against a nation friendly to the United States.' Dr Goebbels was seriously displeased. De Rochemont himself, unlike many of his staff, was at heart apolitical. But he knew a good story when he saw one, and was a genius at gaining publicity for his product.

Channel 4's extracts from *March of Time* demonstrate de Rochemont's technical mastery—all the films are well shot, some are superb, above all given the newsreel limitations of time and facilities. Less happy are the intercut talking heads from de Rochemont's staff, chiefly those who worked in London. Their loyalty and enthusiasm is apparent, but they have little interesting to say about how the films were made, and take rather too long in saying it. One simply hungers to get back to the clips.

Like Raymond Fielding in his 1978 book *The March of Time*, the television programmes show too much uncritical reverence for the script quality of *MOT*. It was glib, it was smart, it was often sharp, witty and brave. But it displayed no more depth of thought or research than *Time* magazine. The essence of both film and magazine was their exploitation of large cutting libraries. Any competent journalist or scriptwriter, armed with access to a good library, could display the sort of mastery of the subject revealed in most issues of *MOT* with a couple of mornings at the typewriter.

March of Time began to die in World War II, when the restrictions of censorship and common war aims began to

make it pretty much like any other newsreel. Its bite, its brash self-confidence were fading. Louis de Rochemont departed, to be replaced by his brother Dick, a cultured and cosmopolitan figure who none the less proved to lack the vital spark to make newsreels that could grip the world. One of their colleagues pronounced a shrewd epitaph not only on the de Rochemonts, but on the qualities needed in any great original journalist or film-maker: 'Dick de Rochemont was too civilised to be a producer of films, to the extent of thinking that it was the most important thing in the world. He knew God-damned well it wasn't. Louis did not. Louis believed it was the most important.'

March of Time ailed through the late 40s, and was put out of its misery at last in 1951, under the shadow of the new television age. There was no more cause to mourn its passing than that of *Picture Post*, the old *Daily Express*, the original *Tonight* programme or *That Was The Week That Was*. Each was an original that had its moment, blossomed and died when its moment was gone, as by their nature every creation of the media must. There is less cause to mourn *MOT*, which was decently buried, than those programmes or publications which are maintained on life support machines long after technical brain death has taken place.

March of Time never made money, indeed the series' 300 subjects and 200 issues cost its parent millions of dollars. Roy Larsen, who was responsible for its birth and for its financial support throughout its existence, deserves almost as much credit as Louis de Rochemont for what it was and what it became. It is a mistake for posterity to overstate its claims. It was technically proficient, full of life and energy and a dynamic that reflected de Rochemont's passion. But it possessed very limited intellectual substance; slender indeed by comparison, for instance, with such another parallel popular organ as *Picture Post*. *MOT* was, above all, great entertainment of its day. It is as such that it should be watched and earn its bouquets today. ■

1938. Father Divine at a meeting in Harlem.



1938. Czechoslovakia: Sudeten Germans in the square at Eger.



JEAN-LUC GODARD 1985

These are not the days

MARC GERVAIS



Je Vous Salue, Marie (JVSM) has served as the cultural (and, to an extent, political) *événement/scandale* of 1985 in at least France and Italy; last May, the star-studded *Détective* arrived in Cannes, heralded both as official French entry and as the return in force of the Nouvelle Vague; and it is only two years ago that *Prénom Carmen* garnered Venice's highest accolade. Can it be that we are experiencing a Jean-Luc Godard renaissance as *auteur* star and as the international cinema's most 'significant' film director? 'There are two races of men'—this from Mauriac *films* (Claude) in January 1985—'Those who are sensitive to the genius of Jean-Luc Godard, and the others.'

Mauriac's rather categorical statement, and the *cause célèbre* that occasioned it, prove at least one thing: Godard has not lost his ability to elicit extreme responses. What is noteworthy, however, is that the *enfant terrible* of the Nouvelle Vague is enjoying a prominence denied him since the end of the 60s. Not that Godard had disappeared, to be sure. A dedicated group of the faithful never wavered, clinging to an often stridently proclaimed conviction that Godard was still at the very forefront of world cinema, one of its most conscious, conscientious and prophetic practitioners. But more and more, the *godardiens* appeared marginalised, devotees of a shrinking chapel of ideological adherents.

Godard's two latest creations, *JVSM* and *Détective*, then, present a rather special challenge to the critic, and they tend to be approached with a certain amount of trepidation: Godard the unconditional master, or Godard dismissed? Even setting aside the polemics,

the critic faces the same problem that Godard has always created: get into a Godard movie and you risk opening up a Pandora's box of critical booby traps. Not that Godard's films are in themselves so complex or impenetrable, at least for those long acquainted with his work. But there is something about them that leads inexorably into a far broader context; and inevitably that extremely complex context tends to become the centre of contention. Like no one else in film, Godard forces us to face up, as objectively as possible, to our own norms and criteria. Any critical assessment of *JVSM* and of *Détective* makes us question anew our notions of 'relevance', 'signification', 'aesthetic pleasure/beauty'—not to mention film, art, life. And that, in itself, surely represents something of an achievement, especially in the context of the appallingly standardised cinema production at the present moment.

To begin at what one might call the first level of these two movies, and with relatively objective, observable data—the sights and the sounds and the way they are put together—*JVSM* and *Détective* undeniably bear the unique Godard trademark. Both films are structured on a kaleidoscopic rhythm, shaping and reshaping controlled segments of images and sounds in shifting formations. And as usual, the mere recitation of what some of these bits and pieces are goes an amazingly long way in giving us the feel of the Godard experience, an experience that has its aspects of consistency, harking back even to Godard's earliest features.

JVSM is specifically Swiss, but it is quintessentially Europe 1985. The drab

symbols (icons) of contemporary city clutter—cars, highways, gas stations, bleak nondescript rooms, a basketball court—surround, smother or break up other kinds of images, painterly 'poetic' ones: green fields, blood-red poppies, the moon slit by a cloud sliver, shimmering or storm-tossed waters (Lac Léman?), the sun. The soundtrack, in typical Godard fashion, works its own collage effects: phrases of Bach and Dvorak, street noise, 'sacred' or 'human' silences, isolated or in confusing combinations with snippets of dialogue, coarse vulgarities, philosophical probings of the origin of the universe (and, implicitly, of the end of mankind). In other words, a potpourri of the sights, sounds and ideas of the contemporary world and of our cultural heritage.

Wandering through this filmscape are nondescript characters, actors basically unknown to the film world at large—and that includes the 21-year-old who plays Godard's Virgin Mary (Myriem Roussel, a young woman who as a teenager, we are informed, became a real-life present-day incarnation of Galatea by agreeing to put herself totally and exclusively, for two or three years, under Monsieur Godard's control). Mary is a teenager who works at her father's petrol station, Joseph is a rather dim-witted taxi driver and Gabriel, who pops up unexpectedly now and again, is a harsh, cretinous busybody. There are a few other 'significant', but unconnected *dramatis personae*: a professor who shares with us insights about the universe, a student (Eve) with whom he is having an affair and a befuddled gynaecologist. Whatever charm or vibrancy any of these performers may be endowed with by nature is studiously obliterated by Godard's cold, calculated and unsympathising film treatment, which creates instead zero-degree incarnations of unprepossessing humanity. And whatever may or may not be going on 'inside' is hidden deep below a zombie-like surface.

Détective has Paris apparently for a setting, but a Paris radically reduced to a few rooms in a turn-of-the-century hotel that has had its moment of elegance: the bar restaurant, kitchen, lobby, billiard room, a few corridors and staircases, four bedrooms, one of them with a view overlooking a video porn shop. This time it is some of France's star performers—Nathalie Baye, Claude Brasseur, a mesmerising Johnny Hallyday, Laurent Terzieff, Jean-Pierre Léaud, Alain Cuny—who undergo the Godard neutering (so to speak). Exaggerated, self-conscious clichés from *film noir*, they form four disparate groupings: a fight promoter, his boxer, trainer and two or three nymphets; a Mafia lord, with young prince, princess and attendant; a commercial pilot and his disenchanted wife; and a detective, his mistress and his uncle—each group pretty well limited to its own defined areas of the hotel. One of the fascinating aspects of *Détective* is the spectacle afforded of high-profile French stars of past and present beginning as *film noir*



Je Vous Salue, Marie: Myriem Roussel (Marie).

archetypes—and as film stars—and then gradually losing their distinctiveness, their function as audience-identification and plot-excitement agents/devices. They are indeed devices, but belonging to an essentially different kind of enterprise.

Plot? In each film a story of sorts does emerge, characters and events more or less coalesce into some kind of 'plot'. But that is really a highly inaccurate way of describing matters. The story of Mary and the birth of Jesus and the layers of centuries of tradition and art, and the *film noir*'s countless retellings and minor variations on that genre's basic kind of story, pre-exist; they have a life of their own in our culture as myth or film genre before Godard does his cinematographic things to them. Far removed from what the mass audience

craves (the consumer delights furnished by traditional plot manipulation), *JVSM* and *Détective* all but destroy their stories, which none the less are allowed to survive Godard's vampiric treatment, but as bloodless, fractured, elliptical, herky-jerky remnants. The interest obviously lies far removed from plot, more in the communication of Godard's attitudes and in the strategies employed to communicate them.

And so *JVSM* spends much of its time studying, with gynaecological precision, the body of young Mary in a series of poses, some of them more or less obvious references to paintings of the past (one French exegete was able to dredge up 're-creations' of over a dozen 'masters') and all of them strangely cold and unsympathetic. Godard aficionados are familiar with his unsettling recourse to

Détective: Nathalie Baye.



oppositions: Mary's nudity/virginity; the sacred language and the profane; actors apparently experiencing pain, longing, love, yet totally denuded of attractiveness, lyricism, 'depth'; symbols that may not be symbols; and today's nowhere-ness set against vaguely familiar apocalyptic horizons.

Détective is marked by similarly criss-crossed signs. Terzieff's beautiful poetry readings and the street obscenities of some of the others; images of corrosive ennui, cries of middle-aged pain and anguish counterpointed by off-hand explorations of more or less naked teenage girls; snatches of music, semi-amputated scenes, distanciating overacting (especially in Léaud's frenetic and funny detective)—all this, surely, constitutes terrain well explored through the years by Godard.

Dialectics upon Dialectics

Godard's attitude to plot has always served as a distinguishing mark of his cinema. Indeed, one could write a history of his films from the point of view of plot/anti-plot dialectics and the degree to which the process is fleshed out in each of them. In his post-68 'Dziga-Vertov' days, and in the ensuing period of image/sound media experimentation at Son-image, plot all but disappeared. But even before 1968, from the very beginning, *l'intrigue* is subjected to derailing, digression, subversion; it serves more as a pretext, a 'necessary' one, it would seem, imposed by the requirements, or at least by the conventions and habits of feature film-making, which in fact permits Godard to do whatever it is that he really wants to do. Little surprise, then, that for a number of qualified observers, Godard's films were seen as the works of an essayist rather than a storyteller.

JVSM and *Détective* mark a return of sorts, in terms of dialectical plot utilisation, to that pre-68 period. But beyond plot, the dialectical process may be seen as more all-embracing, encompassing almost every aspect of Godard's film-making. *A Bout de Souffle* began the dialectical game with film genre itself, in this instance Godard's favourite 'victim' (and, one feels, the one closest to his own poetic sensibility), *film noir*. *Vivre sa Vie*, *Alphaville*, *Bande à Part*, *Pierrot le Fou* and *Made in U.S.A.* were to continue the sometimes playful, sometimes tragic assault. Today's *Détective* would simply be two hours of stasis were it not for the urgency, intellectual and otherwise, furnished by the genre, and what Godard does to it.

So too for culture in the broader sense, and so for myth. One could describe *Le Mépris* and *Pierrot le Fou* as elegies to the death of myth and culture, and yet as tragic longings for their lost relevance. *JVSM*, for its part, takes on what is perhaps western culture's central myth (or at least parts of that myth), the birth of Christ. As with great impertinence

the film bounces off what has so far constituted a cinema taboo (Mary's virginity, etc), one wonders just what Godard's real attitude is to this cultural artifact. Is he giving it an absurdist reading, desacralising it, mocking it, or is he subtly reaffirming its possibility and using it to judge the contemporary desecralised culture?

But even before considerations of mythic or genre 'content' and plotting come to the fore, the dialectical mind-set finds its expression at a more immediate, specifically cinematic level. Earlier on, when I indicated that *JVSM* and *Détective* are structured on various series of what might be construed as polar oppositions, the terms of reference were primarily thematic. But the very ordering of the episodes, the editing of the film in its shiftings from one sequence to the next, parallels this approach. 'Normal' film purposes, such as those of advancing the story, increasing the tension or developing the character or theme 'properly', are cavalierly set aside. Rather it is the antithetical comment, the comic irony or the caustic doubt, that are served.

JVSM: The moon glows mysteriously as a voiceover intones aspects of the universe's profound mystery: 'And what if chance does not exist? Life was willed, desired, foreseen, ordained, programmed by a resolute, superior intelligence.' Cut to a gym, bored people muttering inane conversation, watching youngsters play basketball.

Détective: Johnny Hallyday, the harried fight promoter who owes money to both the commercial pilot and the Mafia lord, is in his hotel room, surrounded by his dimwits and groupies; one of the unclad girls looking out of the window at the video porn shop asks: 'Why are they called xxx films?' Cut to Claude Brasseur, the pilot, leaning against the

wall in a hallway, sobbing in anguish.

Unfortunately, I am unable to describe these examples with total accuracy. But they are typical, and the point being made is true to the film. What, precisely, is going on? What is Godard doing to us? What is the comment, the significance arising from such juxtapositions?

Dialectics between scenes, yes; but dialectics are equally at work *within* the sequence, created this time by Godard's *mise en scène*. The scene from *Détective* mentioned above, or a similar one in another room: Laurent Terzieff, he of the incomparably rich voice and impeccable theatrical diction, is reciting a poetic excerpt on the tragedy of life, or whatever; he lies on a rumpled bed, in a bleak, neutral room whose décor one can best describe as calculated Godard nothing; the camera pans slowly, casually noticing a girl (his nephew Detective Léaud's fiancée?) undressing quite as casually for the benefit of the apparently oblivious uncle; she, too, is looking out of the window at the garish, expressionistically lit porno establishment... All of which sets the audience off on a very confusing mind journey—from boredom, perhaps, or poetic reverie to musings centred on today's culture, environment, human relationships, poetry, sex, pornography, movies?

This kind of process is a constant as well in the *mise en scène* of *JVSM*, manifested in a multitude of ways, some of them funny. One very sly, insiders' gag: via a huge, abrupt ellipsis, we are hurtled into the Nativity scene: quite lovely, appropriate music, but no sight of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Rather, a series of loving close-ups of the heads (faces) of the traditional animals in attendance give us the (metonymic) essentials. And then, lo and behold, there is our friend Balthazar, the Silent Witness, framed as he was in Bresson's mystical movie, his

Je Vous Salue, Marie: Thierry Rode (Joseph), Myriem Roussel.



beautiful languid eyes contemplating the Baby, presumably, but actually looking at us. Do we laugh (maybe with Godard)? Are we touched by the tribute to or mockery of Bresson, or the Nativity? Or are we consciously watching a movie, an artificial re-creation of, or commentary on, culture?

Dialectics, however, are far from done; they burrow even deeper into the film text, into its bits and pieces, the individual shots. Most of film history's acknowledged masters, it is safe to claim, have worked at achieving effects via a convergence of the constituent elements within the shot. That is, they use, to their own specific ends, the film language heritage: certain actions or moments are communicated in one manner or another by the appropriate combining of composition, camera movement, focal texture, lighting, colour, music, noise, dialogue, etc, etc, each element complementing, intensifying, adding to the others. Not so Godard: in any number of ways he subverts the traditional process. A certain dramatic moment (in terms of the traditional importance of the specific 'action') may be neutralised by haphazard composition, pedestrian lighting or movement, acting style or sound; some potentially scabrous situation becomes more or less innocent, because one barely hears what is being said or because a lyrical musical passage underlines pathos; drabness or ugliness can find its furtive moment of poetic beauty through a discreet use of composition, lighting, music, rhythm and so on. From the outset Godard has practised this manipulation of film language, creating a disturbing, ever changing discourse in which the elements are at war with one another. Having gone through the years of experimentation and analysis after 1968, he may now have returned to his

already dialectical style of plotting; but he has also returned to the more subversive kind of undermining operated by the use of dialectical film language.

Ambiguity

Dialectics, series of dialectics dancing precariously on a sea of unfathomable ambiguity. Used here in its widest, vaguest, least academically precise sense, the term dialectics is a handy one; but only a tool, really, to help us appropriate intellectually what goes on in a Godard film. The reality communicated by the film is far more complex; and what is most deeply felt at the heart of the experience is an almost paralysing sense of helplessness, frustration, despair at the complexities, contradictions, fundamental ambiguities of a universe we can neither comprehend nor cope with. In the beginning, of course, Godard's films expressed this, but with a counterbalancing of romantic yearning for an alternative. 1968 banished romantic longing, proposing instead the attempt at solution through a Marxist praxis (of sorts) as applied to the analysis and the production of filmic meaning. That period, too, has come to an end. What is Godard left with or, rather, what human response do his present-day films incarnate? A not unimportant question, for Godard is very much the prophet, the man who reads the signs.

JVSM and *Détective* furnish an answer, I believe, part of which has already been indicated. The communication of ambivalence through a plot discourse structured on multi-levelled dialectics is still part of the Godard creative process; and in that, Godard's two latest films signal a return, more than anything else, to the pre-1968

style. Godard's dosage of dialectical signs leads to the possibility of *simultaneous opposed* significations—and to arguments between confused factions vehemently upholding opposed interpretations (witness the *JVSM* furore). To put it succinctly and abstractly, both *JVSM* and *Détective* raise the possibility that we are going simultaneously from myth/genre to its annihilation, and from apparent parody/subversion of myth/genre to its reaffirmation.

So far so good. But is it really accurate to claim that Godard 1985 is the extension or, perhaps better, the mature version of the Godard of the glory days of 1959-1968, that extraordinarily vital period which gave us *Pierrot le Fou*, *Vivre sa Vie*, *Une Femme Mariée*, *A Bout de Souffle*, *Alphaville* and the others?

The 60s and Godard and the Nouvelle Vague: for a legitimate, comprehensive answer to our question (i.e., Godard of today compared to Godard of pre-68), we have to look back to those heady times which many of us who lived them as adults now tend to recall in dramatised, even romanticised terms. No one in feature film epitomised them as did Jean-Luc Godard. For here was the scourge of traditional cinema, the innovator, the playful iconoclast, the cynic/romantic, the hater/lover (of the cinema, culture, *les autres*, life), the poet/essayist who communicated so well the impossibility of communicating. Each new Godard movie was a dazzlingly fresh creation, it seemed, turning its back on whatever had come before it in film history—including whatever preceded it from his own fertile production machine. 'L'aventure du cinéma contemporain c'est l'aventure du langage cinématographique,' he was quoted as saying.

Those were the days, too, when Roland Barthes was exploring his notions on semiotics. For him, the glory of the novel (and, by extension, all art) lay in 'le jeu vertigineux des signifiants'—the dizzying interplay of signifiers coupling and uncoupling in fresh configurations, indefinitely expanding shifting shapes and patterns, slipping into and out of ever-changing perceptions and possibilities of signification.

Umberto Eco (in *L'Opera Aperta*) was publishing his insights into contemporary culture, describing one of its essential thrusts as the impossible quest for the *open* form, the open work, which alone could adequately express a new age structured on relativity, transactional psychology, indetermination, the loss of the absolutes, etc. Ambiguity, the multi-levelled, the multi-interpretational, had become a conscious, explicit aim of art and literature. Joyce had tried it earlier on, and now concrete music and action painting and moving sculpture and theatre happenings were the expression of that quest. It was all part of a new dialectic, really: one set out to be totally open, and yet once the work of art existed it had to have its own form, fixed and closed for that moment. Eco rescued one poor Sorbonne film aesthetics doctoral aspirant (me) from his thesis impasse: 'Why of course (eureka)

Détective: Claude Brasseur.



and wasn't Godard's cinema bringing just that dialectical quest of the open work to the feature film?—Godard even more than Resnais or Antonioni (whose *L'Avventura* was Eco's own choice of model for the open cinema).

But Godard's cinema, serving as a matchless reflector of some of the most exciting and painful aspects of that period, could not be reduced merely to Barthes' dazzling play of signifiers where, in fact, meaning/signification/meaningfulness are more or less part of the game. For Godard's movie signifiers—the sights and sounds and their structuring—themselves had a powerful, *significant* impact on many of us. They had, for each, a *value-for-me*, something to do with recognition of my world, my inner life—the longings, fears, hopes, obsessions, whatever. It was not merely the 'functioning of text' so *à la page* these days. That other side of aesthetic experience, the highly subjective personal appreciation/involvement/dialogue springing from recognition of value-for-me—brilliantly explored these last few years by Dudley Andrew and others, and a much needed complement to the excessively 'materialist' semiotically-oriented film studies of the last two decades—was organically part of the Godard movie event. Godard had his own unique, seemingly spontaneous and haphazard way of fastening on to the varied aspects of the contemporary cultural landscape.

Moreover, the manner in which he was choosing the signs and putting them together spoke powerfully to his contemporaries (those films still speak powerfully to us today) because the resulting discourse was so fundamentally open. Ambiguity? Ambivalence? Inability to find a fixed position? That was the signification. In other words, the world did not go to Godard to find a wisdom, a serenity it did not possess, but rather to experience the vitality, sometimes despairing, sometimes laughing, often creative—its own *zeitgeist*.

Et Maintenant

That was Godard 1959-1968, and it is perhaps the tragedy of his latest creations that they are the products of another *zeitgeist*. Godard may seem still to be dancing the dance of the dialectics, only the spirit and fun of the dance are no more; and the dialectics are severely reduced, contained within parameters that are relatively closed.

Part of the reason, no doubt, lies in the cultural fabric of our time. Godard himself has been through several radical metamorphoses. His 'Dziga-Vertov' phase (1968-1972) with his young mentor, Jean-Pierre Gorin, and what might be called the discipline of Marxist filmmaking/analysing exercises, and then the subsequent flight, in 1973, from Paris to Grenoble and the setting up of Sonimage (a production lab for research into, and the creation of, audio-visual



Detective: Johnny Hallyday.

media products), have probably brought Godard to the point where an authentic return (whether to be wished for or not) to the spirit of the early days is simply not possible.

The man who has finally come back to his native Switzerland, living in a relatively pastoral setting overlooking Lac Léman, between Geneva and Lausanne, may not be totally disenchanted, and he may be far from a burnt-out case. But his cinematographic sign, the basic material of any film-making activity, may well have been dissected and analysed to death. The mistrust of that sign, and of the very ability of cinema really to communicate, was always there (*Pierrot le Fou*), but it was mitigated, as often as not, by a spirit of fun, impishness, inventiveness or romance; now the mistrust seems total, cold and unrelenting.

In spite, then, of what was put forward in the early part of this article, and especially in comparison with Godard's early work, *Detective* and *JVSM* can hardly be described in terms of 'dazzling interplay of signifiers'. One is terribly conscious of the *déjà vu*, sans the bounce, the joy in creativity. When we already know the rhythms, the 'surprises', Godard's cinema tends to sag. One thinks in terms of predictability, self-parody or cliché. There is little belief in the game, and less interest in playing it.

As to that former ability to touch us significantly with the rhythms of a chaotic, frightening, exciting world? Here, too, *JVSM* and *Detective* suffer in comparison. For one of the dialectical phenomena I (deliberately) passed over above has to do with the reality/artificial representation opposition. In the pre-68 period, Godard had no equal in capturing the feel of urban life; in what seemed unpremeditated fashion he managed to gather into a collage disparate bits of unrelated objects, communicating the city with amazing poetic accuracy. But

we were also aware that it was a collage, not 'reality', but self-created cultural artifacts of his choice. 'Ce n'est pas une image juste, c'est juste une image.' Call it symptomatic reality—the film text was an amazingly open battleground between forces affirming reality and forces achieving aesthetic distanciation and self-consciousness.

That dialectic has ceased in *JVSM* and *Detective*. We are made totally aware of the artifice of what we see and hear, no matter how accurately the signifiers may seem to represent external reality. It may be because of the broken rhythms and overall atonality, the obvious comments and the references to myth in *JVSM*, the caricatural elements in *Detective*. But we know. Godard's distrust of cinematic realism is so great that the signs are immediately perceived as artificial objects of communication, the creations stemming from artistic manipulation. And this is matched by a rejection of the cinema's power to seduce and enthrall. Talented re-creations of paintings, remarkable compositions and the like, remain just that, for an aesthetic or communicational shield has been erected around them; and we are protected from the possibility of involvement, from relaxing self-awareness even for a moment. Godard's last four films (*Passion*, *Prénom Carmen*, *JVSM* and *Detective*), as someone has noted, do indeed resemble more the works of a painter or a musician who has composed carefully with the appropriate materials. Adieu life on the wing.

Surely there is a tragic irony here. What was so important at a certain time—to restore to the spectator a sense of awareness and responsibility based on the realisation that what she/he is seeing on the screen is, after all, artistic manipulation; or (restating it in ideological jargon) to liberate the consumer

from the alienating seductions of spectacle and the bourgeois illusion of reality—has ended up by leading Godard into some kind of creative impasse. Godard was always adept at distancing, he could make us think; but now the throb of vitality is relatively extinct.

The fundamental openness of the film text (as they say) is gone; and the dominant atmosphere is that of still-life, or even death. *Détective* smacks of a remake of *Pierrot le Fou* and *Made in U.S.A.*, but beside the intensity of *Pierrot*, *Détective* is indeed still-life posturing. And the ambivalence has been radically reduced. The endings of both *JVSM* and *Détective*—Mary's vaguely obscene applying of lipstick and the sardonic happy outcome for Léaud and his fiancée after *Détective's* *de rigueur* killings—render explicit what was sufficiently clear all along. Whatever glimmers there may have been of longing, or of life, or of possible meaningfulness—to play off against the vulgarity, misanthropy, cynical detachment, claustrophobic absence of hope and vitality, in order to keep the dialectic operative—are shown as illusory. They are systematically smothered in an overall texture/structure that seriously inhibits dialectic. Sadly, the Godard system is now a closed one . . . *ou presque*.

One is tempted to set up over-simplified (and therefore unfair) comparisons between the films of the internationally acclaimed Godard of pre-1968 and today's *JVSM* and *Détective*, all to the advantage, of course, of the early period. Where there was fire, now there are ashes; the fun has yielded to weariness; the crude and the obvious have replaced wit and nuance; the longing and suffering occasioned by male/female relationships among equals, and the concomitant sad impossibility of romantic fulfilment, have frozen into a clinical, middle-aged artistic obsession with very young women's sexual parts; spontaneity and life-on-the-wing have withered into still-life calculation. Complexity has indeed yielded much to a closed universe. Godard has evolved into the aesthetics of the German 1920s? Godard?

Needless to add that most spectators, rebuffed by the willed one-sidedness, do not experience a sense of enthrallment, the spontaneous recognition of value-forme. They feel the manipulation by a systematic application of expertly calculated ideas. And so, spectator involvement tends to fritter into boredom. The present Godard films may be communicating certain ideas more clearly; but as open reflectors of the human situation, they are sadly reduced; and as aesthetic objects, they have lost much of their power to please . . . and to re-create. They may be fine to write about, but less satisfying to experience.*

And yet . . . and yet . . . Godard is Godard, ever elusive, allusive, illusive.

*Interestingly, university students today find themselves much more involved in the early Godard films than in his recent ones.

The critic feels compelled to hedge, to own up to having overstated the case in an attempt to make the point. Some exegetes (witness Mauriac) have indeed found *JVSM* profoundly moving, nothing less than a doubt-racked solicitation to a deadened, materialistic world to be present to the possibility of the sacred. 'And what if chance does not exist?' to be sure. For them at least, an open dialectic is still *la règle du jeu godardien*. What has changed is the relative force of the polar oppositions. Godard, in this view, would still be the same old Godard. Which means that the present corrosive pessimism was always there, and sometimes with naked intensity, as in *Weekend*. Conversely, today's *Détective* and *JVSM* have glimmers of the old 'romantic' yearning. It is a question, then, only of degrees: the earlier dialectic admittedly was more lively, broad, open and evenly balanced, whereas today's is relatively more closed, cold, one-sided, sombre.

And so, Godard 1985, and two final *mises-au-point*. Laying aside the polemics, the burden of expectations engendered by the past, the critic in all fairness must conclude that both *JVSM* and *Détective* are unquestionably highly personal statements, the artistic expressions of one man's sensibility—and pro-

phetic representations of one stream within the culture flow of the tired and disenchanted 80s. As such they are serious works, undoubtedly worthy of exploration.

That, however, becomes especially sad, if my critical assessment bears any validity. Cannes 1985 was to have been a celebration of the old Nouvelle Vague and, perhaps, a reincarnation of its spirit. The reality turned out to be otherwise: the Cannes screens revealed that conformity dominates the international film scene as perhaps never before. The film-making system, as indeed all audio-visual producing systems, has reached a point of critical stasis. No new wave ripples, then, were experienced. Instead, the Nouvelle Vague's most beloved figure, François Truffaut, was mourned; and in *Détective*, Godard, its once most radically creative exponent, was found frustratingly wanting. For even his cinema seemed entrapped within a relatively closed system of its own. Jean-Luc Godard may still be a poet of his times, our dispirited times. But if world cinema is to find new directions and a renewed openness, it will, sad to say, have to look elsewhere—to another of those new waves that periodically emerge to renew an art form. ■

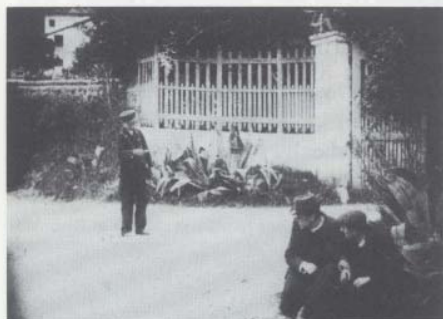
Je Vous Salue, Marie: Myriem Roussel.



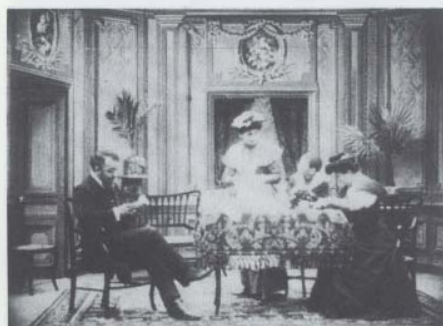
FALSCHES TELEGRAMM

Shot 1. TITLE: The False Telegram

2. Two men order drinks and then write a telegram at a table outside a café.
3. TELEGRAM INSERT: 'Come immediately to castle. Child very sick. von Sturm.'
4. The men pay for their drinks and leave.
5. One man sends the other into a post office.



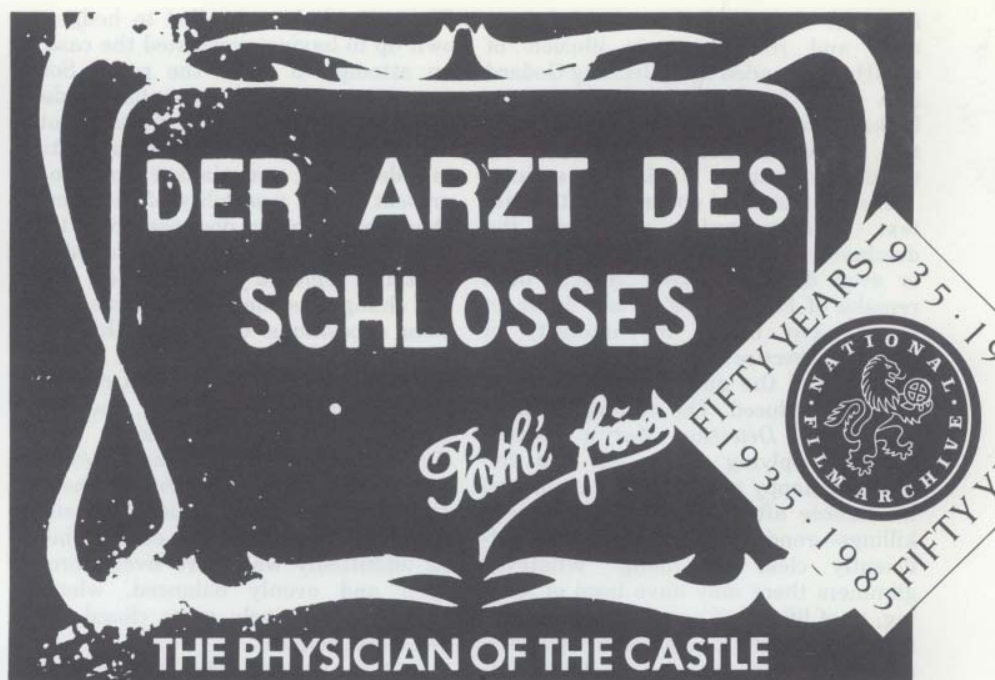
6. The men loiter outside the gate to the driveway of a house. They watch a postman enter with a telegram.
7. Outside the house, the postman gives the telegram to the maid.



8. The maid gives the telegram to the doctor, who is with his wife and son in the living room. The doctor leaves the room.



9. The doctor comes into his office and gets his equipment.



The most striking thing about *The Physician of the Castle*, a Pathé film from early 1908, is the extent to which it anticipates many of D. W. Griffith's methods of film construction, such as the cutting back and forth during a race to the rescue, and also the use of movement from room to room, not only as a thing in itself but also to give the criminals a series of suspenseful doors to break down to get to their prey. To a few people already in the know, however, *The Physician of the Castle* will only be a small surprise, because they have seen other films made between 1906 and 1908, mostly by the Pathé company, which show earlier stages in the development of cross-cutting between parallel actions. In fact, we know that Griffith saw at least one of these Pathé films, *Le Cheval Emballé* (*The Runaway Horse*), which cuts back and forth four pairs of times between separate events inside and outside a house, because his 1908 film *The Curtain Pole* is fairly closely based on it.

So where has *The Physician of the Castle* been hiding, unknown and unsung, all these years? The answer is that it was not hidden at all, but waiting, almost fully catalogued, in the National Film Archive to be looked at by anyone curious enough to do so. The original print had been given to the Archive around 1942, by a Mr H. R. James. It then stayed in the vaults, with periodic testing until the first signs of chemical instability appeared in 1956, when the appropriate committee ordered its duplication on to acetate-based safety stock. Harold Brown, Film Preservation Officer of the Archive, made the duplicate negative on his legendary home-made printing machine used for shrunken and delicate films, and he also made an initial approximate dating of the film when its title was still unknown, using his knowledge of the small changes year by year in the print stock used by the major early film-makers. From this lead, precise identification was made by the

Archive's cataloguing department with the help of the plot summaries in the *Bioscope*, the British film trade paper of the time, which listed *The Physician of the Castle* as being released in Britain on 7 May 1908.

There the matter rested until, moved by the new spirit in film history which requires that the historian see all the relevant films available, Ben Brewster and I were viewing a group of films to top up our knowledge of the first twenty years of French cinema before going to a conference on the subject at Perpignan last year. After we had seen *The Physician of the Castle*, Ben Brewster established from the American trade journal the *Moving Picture World* that it had been released in New York as *A Narrow Escape* on 28 March 1908, which is just at the point when D. W. Griffith had started writing film scripts for the Biograph company but before he began directing. (This is the kind of helpful extra information which film archives are glad to get, hard pressed as their staff are by the mass of material in their care. And anyone can join in such film history research, though it must be realised that one gets no material reward for it. Indeed it usually costs one money.) Despite all that we know about the English and American releases of *The Physician of the Castle*, we still do not know either its original French release date, or indeed its original French title. This is part of a rather general problem with French films made after the middle of 1907, for there are no French catalogues or trade papers available outside France, and possibly even inside France, for dates between 1907 and 1910.

Like the surviving prints of many early films, *The Physician of the Castle* had lost some footage at the beginning and end, where the wear and tear are greatest on prints, and both the main- and end-titles were missing, as is often the case. Indeed, it seemed probable to me that the whole first scene was missing, and enquiry showed that the Archive

had other incomplete versions of the same film, one with Spanish titles from the Uruguayan archive in Montevideo, and a German-language version acquired in the Joseph Joye collection from Switzerland. The Spanish version, *El Medico del Castillo*, had been obtained by the Archive as a result of making safety copies of a group of early films sent by the Montevideo archive for the 1978 Brighton conference of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) on *Cinema 1900-1906*. (The National Film Archive sometimes provides this kind of service for the smaller members of FIAF, which do not have full technical facilities for film preservation.) *Der Arzt des Schlosses*, the version with German titles, came from the large collection of early films assembled by a Swiss monk, Joseph Joye, for teaching purposes around the time of the First World War.

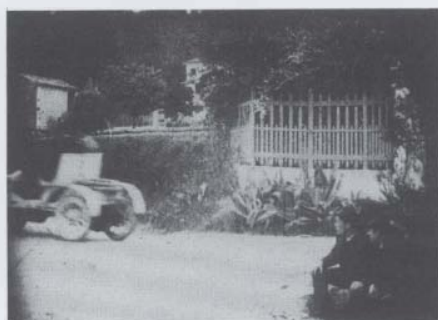
Like most of the films in this collection, *Der Arzt des Schlosses* was on the verge of decomposing when it was acquired in 1977. Not only that, but sections of the film had already been cut out at some earlier date, presumably because those sections already showed signs of deterioration. Exactly the same applied to the version from Montevideo, which also had visibly sticky emulsion and missing sections. Both these copies had been duplicated on to safety stock shortly after being received by the Archive, and then catalogued by Anne Burton and Don Swift respectively, who identified them as the same film as *The Physician of the Castle* already held by the Archive. This was done, as is usual in such cases, not by actual physical comparison of the prints, but by using the story description entered in the Archive catalogue for the copy acquired earlier.

Once the importance of the film was recognised, a physical comparison of the viewing copies of all the versions was made, and it was found that the German and Spanish versions, though much less complete than the English one, contained the sections missing from it. Elaine Burrows, the Archive Viewings Officer, who is never slow to action, took a splicer, and a complete viewing copy was assembled from duplicate prints of the three versions. It is this which is described above. The first three shots of this complete version came from the German print, and the last shot half from the German version and half from the Spanish version. Quite remarkably, those two incomplete half shots, which were all that the Spanish and German versions contained of the last shot, fitted together perfectly, to the very single frame, to make up the complete final scene of the film. This was an event that gave a slightly eerie feeling, suggesting either that *Somebody Up There Likes Us* or that the creators of *Tlön, Uqbar and Orbis Tertius* are still at work.

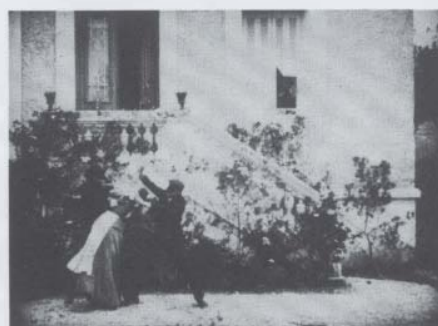
Happy 50th birthday, National Film Archive.

Barry Salt

10. Back in the living room, the doctor says goodbye to his family.



11. He drives out of his front gate watched by the two men.
12. The doctor's car going down the road in the distance.
13. The two criminals put on masks and enter the grounds of the house.



14. The men ring the door bell and stab the maid when she comes out, but they are seen by the doctor's wife who has been watching through the window.
15. Inside the living room the wife and son barricade the door.
16. TITLE: Arriving at the castle.



17. The doctor drives through the front gates.



18. In the living room of the castle, the owner and his family are somewhat surprised at the doctor's visit, but they let him examine one of their little girls all the same.

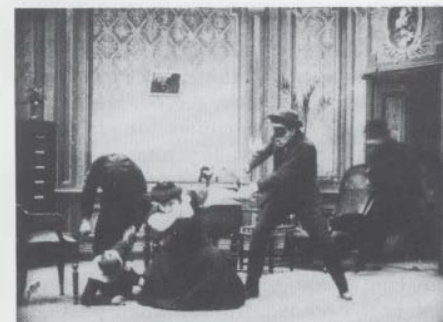
19. Back at the doctor's house, his wife and son enter his study and barricade the door to that as well.
20. The criminals break through the barricade into the living room.
21. The doctor's wife looks up the phone number of the castle and rings it.
22. At the castle the doctor is given the telephone call.



23. Medium Close Shot of doctor's wife talking on telephone.
24. Medium Close Shot of doctor talking on telephone.
25. Long Shot of doctor talking on telephone.
26. Doctor leaving through the castle gates in his car.
27. Doctor's car going down a stretch of road.



28. Doctor's car stops to pick up two policemen.
29. Doctor's car stops outside the gates to his house, and all run inside.



30. The criminals have just burst through the second barricade, and as they seize his wife and child, the doctor and the policemen rush in and overpower them.
31. Outside the gate the criminals are led away by the police, leaving the doctor standing there in triumph.



NORMAN KRASNA: The Woolworth Touch

Patrick McGilligan

1950: *The Big Hangover*. Norman Krasna (right) with Van Johnson and Elizabeth Taylor.

'The best play I ever saw'

Old screenwriters die without much fanfare. In his heyday, however, which spanned thirty years, Norman Krasna was among Hollywood's best and brightest. 'No matter how expensive he may be,' Nunnally Johnson once observed, 'a reliable A-one scriptwriter is a demonstrable economy. Any time a producer can get Norman Krasna for his story, he is not only going to save money but will be able to build up his health again with long hours of untroubled rest and relaxation, for the most complex of his problems has been solved. He knows that when the day comes for shooting, the script will be ready and so nearly right that any amendments will be a mere matter of routine.'

In the only real sense of the word, Norman Krasna (1909–1984) represents the Hollywood screenwriter as auteur. Not only because, for the most part, he wrote original stories, plays and screenplays without the direct help of collaborators, but also because his stories, and the themes which pre-occupied him, drew directly on the experience of his rags-to-riches life. Growing up poor in New York City, Krasna worked as a shoe salesman in Macy's department store while chipping away at night-school law courses. He was taken, however, with the journalism

and newspaper personalities of the 20s. He borrowed a quarter, it's said, and went downtown to the *New York World*, where he talked his way into a temporary slot as copy boy for the Sunday feature department.

Shortly afterwards—having experienced the radiance of the likes of Walter Lippman, Alexander Woolcott and Louis Weitzenkorn—he quit law school and, to his parents' chagrin, pronounced himself a writer. Krasna was a born up-and-comer, and his energy, not to say his impetuosity, soon earned him a byline reviewing second tier acts at the Palace. He was not yet twenty. With the collapse of the *World*, Krasna went to work for Martin Quigley, editor of the trade journal *The Exhibitors' Herald and Moving Picture World*. He subsequently moved to the Warner Brothers publicity office in Hollywood, where he cultivated a reputation for contriving wacky, and sometimes questionable, press stunts.

He decided to become a playwright and, allegedly, retyped Hecht and MacArthur's *The Front Page* twenty times in order to master dramatic construction. At night he drafted a satire based on his adventures as a Warner's tub-thumper. The result was *Louder Please!*, which he described as 'Nothing but screaming, like *The Front Page*, the

best play I ever saw.' After *Louder Please!* (starring Lee Tracy) opened on Broadway to good notices, Krasna returned to Hollywood, this time as a junior writer at Columbia. He cut his teeth on programmers and Wheeler and Woolsey vehicles. He was soon, however, up for the first of four Oscar nominations for the story and screenplay of *The Richest Girl in the World*, a 1934 trifle with Joel McCrea, Miriam Hopkins and Fay Wray. Though Krasna was 'far more than a gifted one-noter', in the words of his *New York Times* obituarist, it was his role-reversal stories with which he was most closely identified, and *The Richest Girl in the World* was the first film to bear his trademark, the mistaken identity motif.

The wrong man lynched by a mob, a couple who discover that they are not legally married, a millionaire masquerading as a department store clerk—these stories allowed him to explore themes of impersonation and deception and to poke around questions of social injustice. On one level, his mistaken identity stories can be interpreted as the ruminations of a self-made man who always felt, up to a point, an imposter in the company of wealth and fame, way beyond himself socially. At his first Oscar ceremony (he lost to Arthur Caesar for *Manhattan Melodrama*), he was not yet twenty-five, his clothes were a comical mismatch and he was falling down drunk.

Nose to the window

In autumn 1983, I pressed Krasna for an interview. He was living in forced retirement in Los Angeles in a luxurious apartment across from Twentieth Century Fox and around the corner from the Hillcrest Country Club. He was defensive and restless, but still bristling with wit and ideas. He told a revealing anecdote about the inspiration for *The Richest Girl in the World*, which was, in a sense, the trigger for an entire career based on Cinderella-like variations. 'When I was 25 or thereabouts, I already had the antique furniture you see here. I had built a home and had a second-hand Rolls-Royce. The impression you got from reading the Sunday pieces is that I made more money than the President of the United States.

'One evening, I decided to see my idea of the best play—after *The Front Page*—*Green Pastures*. I go in my Rolls-Royce, park it and walk to the Warner Theatre in a sweatshirt, moccasins and three-day beard. I stop at a one-arm joint on the corner called the Busy Bee; hands in pockets, some time to kill, maybe my nose pressed against the window. I meet the eye of a girl—my kind, thin, dark—and I see she's embarrassed and looks away. I say to myself, "Holy mackerel, she thinks I need a meal. She's going to come out and offer me a meal. If she does, I'm going to buy her a diamond bracelet." I stayed at the window, trying to attract her, but I guess she couldn't afford it. I could see she felt terrible because she never came out. Why should I remember a story like that? Forty years or more ago. The idea of mistaken identity, it must always have been on my mind.'

After *The Richest Girl in the World*, Krasna gained a certain prominence and leverage in the film industry. He usually chose to work alone, at home, or on spec without a studio contract. The work flowed: the Fritz Lang dramas *Fury* and *You and Me*; *Mr and Mrs Smith*, Hitchcock's only screwball comedy; a play and screenplay in partnership with Groucho Marx; the vintage 30s and 40s romantic comedies *Hands Across the Table*, *Bachelor Mother*, *The Devil and Miss Jones* (based on his Macy's experience), *The Flame of New Orleans* and *It Started with Eve*. An Academy Award

came for the script of *Princess O'Rourke*, his first movie as director; there were numerous screen adaptations of his plays, including the accomplished *Indiscreet*, directed by Stanley Donen; and *Let's Make Love*, Marilyn Monroe's penultimate film.

Fury (1935-36) was originally developed as a response to an article in the *Nation* about lynchings in the South. It is often cited as an example of Krasna's ability, in the words of Richard Corliss, 'to suggest the tragic and pathetic aspects of mistaken identity.' Although Krasna received another Academy Award nomination for the story, which was then regarded as ingenious social commentary, in our interview he reacted strongly against the suggestion that it was somehow 'serious Krasna'. For one thing the story outline was dictated by the producer Joseph L. Mankiewicz, based on

his recollection of Krasna's 'oral pitch', while the shooting script was considerably fleshed out by Lang and the writer Bartlett Cormack.

'When I look at *Fury*, I almost resent it that I am considered such a big thinker. It has no more invention than my comedies, but it has a setting of obvious social significance. I give myself all kinds of gold stars for the *The Devil and Miss Jones* because, the truth is, there's as much social statement in that farcical comedy, or in *Bachelor Mother*, as there is in *Fury*. Only *Fury* was done as a melodrama, straight on, the lynching of this fellow. The gimmick, the hook, the invention, the *inspiration* is that he is still alive. The moral of the story is that he does the same thing by killing his persecutors. But *Fury* is not any more impressive to me—or the cells that I use are not any different creatively—than my humblest comedy effort.' On the whole, Krasna said, he preferred his comedies and thought of himself primarily as the author of 'social comedies' which championed the underdog.

The Richest Girl in the World: Miriam Hopkins, John Barrymore.



Three people who didn't move

In the ascendant in the 1930s, Krasna was on top of the world in the 40s. When asked to choose his favourite screenplays as filmed, he named three from the early 1940s (*Mr and Mrs Smith*, *The Devil and Miss Jones* and *Princess O'Rourke*), one from 1939 (*Bachelor Mother*) and only one (*My Geisha*, which he produced in 1962) from his later period. All were filmed 'word for word', according to Krasna, 'just as I

wrote them': a rare Hollywood boast.

There were, however, memorable ructions with the enforcers of the Production Code over *The Flame of New Orleans* (1941), a collaboration, Krasna said, between himself and director René Clair. 'We finished the picture and the Hays Office said, "Keep it, it's dirty." A small studio like Universal cannot keep a picture. Things were changed in the storyline. They found that by dropping

the middle two reels it could still be released. The picture is missing two reels. But Marlene Dietrich wasn't right for it. I said to Clair: "You've got Dietrich, one of the great, famous still faces of the world. For the leading man we need someone like Cary Grant, but we can't get him. It has to be a great comedian to make her look funny. A talker."

'I am a believer in this. In *Indiscreet*, with Cary Grant opposite her, Ingrid Bergman turned out to be a wonderful comedy actress. Everybody thought Olivia de Havilland was a great

comedienne in *Princess O'Rourke*. It's not true. All the others were in on the joke, Jane Wyman, Bob Cummings, Charles Coburn. She was surrounded by comedians. So it comes out as a comedy and they put her in *Government Girl* for Dudley Nichols and she falls flat. Don't let *her* be the comedy.

'Lubitsch once explained Dietrich to me: "Miriam Hopkins talks all the time and everything is witty. But when you come to Dietrich, watch, the big trick is that you think she is going to say No, and by God, she says Yes. That's what has to be built up for her." Which is why I said to Clair: "Since you have one frozen face, try for someone like Cary Grant for the other part. Otherwise, it won't even be talking heads, it'll be *looking* heads." They got Bruce Cabot, as far away from Cary Grant as you can go. He stands still, she stands still. But there is one person in the world who stands still more than both of them. For the third part, I said: "Get Menjou," and they went and got Roland Young. You couldn't tell if his lips were moving. Between him, Cabot and Dietrich—three people who didn't move.'



The Flame of New Orleans: Bruce Cabot, Marlene Dietrich, Roland Young.

Asking for a two-inch lens

Krasna's third Oscar nomination, for *The Devil and Miss Jones*, opened the door to direction at a time when scriptwriters like John Huston, Preston Sturges and Billy Wilder were also turning to directing. He lacked the temperament, however, for life on the set and after *Princess O'Rourke*, in 1943, directed only two other films, *The Big Hangover* in 1950 and *The Ambassador's Daughter* in 1956. 'If I hadn't gone into the Army,' he allowed, 'I probably would have kept on writing and directing. But you develop different interests. I worked twenty-four hours a day when I was a kid. I wrote my plays while I held a full-time job. I sensed time was running out. I had the energy then.' Was directing too all-consuming? 'Yes, Nunnally Johnson said that to Groucho. "Groucho, you're on your feet all day." And if it doesn't go good . . . agh! Willy Wyler—his blood doesn't circulate. George Stevens—nothing frightens him. Gee, I'm conscious of spending \$40,000 a day when I'm shooting.'

'And they never let you alone. I like a lot of privacy. "What do you think of this hat? What about her hair? Do you want three hundred extras for tomorrow? If you can get through today, can you use one shot less? Where do you want the camera?" There's no end. You turn round and they're lined up, waiting to get your attention. Also, I'm not a great technician. I used to watch the big ones and they'd ask for a two-inch lens. What do you mean a two-inch lens? I don't know what a two-inch lens looks like. Then, the cutting . . . I'm great in spurts, but you cannot spurt as a director. It's a long, long process.'

At the same time, it was a question

of priorities. Like a handful of other first-rate screenwriters—Samson Raphaelson, for example, or Lillian Hellman—Krasna was able to shuttle between Broadway and Hollywood. Although several of his plays were adapted for the screen—*Dear Ruth*, *John Loves Mary*, *Kind Sir* (the basis for *Indiscreet*), *Who Was That Lady I Saw You With?*—as plays they earned perhaps a tenth as much as the screenplays. This, however, was no deterrent, and in the 30s Krasna the dramatist had set himself sterner tasks. His second play, *Small Miracle*, had a contemporary

religious theme and took place in a theatre lounge. Another, *The Man with the Blond Hair*, which he also directed, was anti-Nazi. But Moss Hart advised Krasna to write for the stage as commercially as he wrote for the movies. 'Krasna,' Hart said of his friend, 'has the best Woolworth's touch I know.'

Why did he persevere with the theatre? 'When I was active in all spheres, we'd have two contracts on the desk, stage play and picture work. I could use either. The picture contract was then \$175,000 or twenty-five per cent of the profit. In the old days, my wife and I would have first-class tickets. Met at the airport by a limousine. A hotel suite, which we might pay for ourselves, although sometimes they

Bachelor Mother: David Niven, Ginger Rogers.



even picked that up. There were all kinds of goodies and side things which were really very flattering. Let alone the influence! The theatre tickets, a press party at '21', and the press agent is with you to pick up the check. You're a big man.

'Now comes the stage money. This contract is a \$500 advance. Thirty-five dollars a day, sometimes twenty-five. Economy ticket for one. Ain't nobody meeting you. No interviews at '21' with the press agent picking up the check. Now you come to the rehearsals. The best place they can manage is a small ballroom or upstairs at the Wintergarten on 42nd Street. Dirty, walls peeling, you're afraid to sit down; and big shows in the theatre are *lucky* if they can get that room upstairs. How is it that everybody is crazy about trying to get into the theatre, especially writers? When you write this wonderful film script, the director, the star or the producer can put on another writer or they can throw the script away. They can change it on the set, or before, if that's what they want.

'In the theatre, the star comes on stage and says, "Well, good morning." And a thin little scriptgirl says, "Excuse me, sir, there's no *Well*." He says, "I'm sorry." He comes on again and says, "Good morning." It doesn't matter that I claim I wrote "Well, good morning" and then "Good morning" fifty times before I decided on "Good morning". The point is that I haven't been paid for the stage

play, \$500 was just a Dramatists Guild option. You decided to do the play, I want to see *my* play. Whether I fail or not.

'In the picture business, they paid . . . I won't say that's being a whore, but I don't complain when they want to change something. On the other hand, I try to arrange it so it doesn't happen to

me, and I don't think any writer has had more original screenplays filmed without a word changed. I tip my hat to the theatre because it's the big gamble. It's the one my peers think the most of. But I don't write a picture like that. I write a picture, you give me the money, and later on I hear what the grosses are . . . *if I believe it.*'

Princess O'Rourke: Olivia de Havilland, Robert Cummings.



A dog walking

In the early 50s, Krasna joined a short-lived production unit at RKO with Jerry Wald. He is credited with co-producing three pictures during this period: Curtis Bernhardt's *The Blue Veil*, the film with which he says he was most involved, a gangster comedy called *Behave Yourself* and Fritz Lang's *Clash by Night*. Otherwise, the RKO experience was something of a nightmare. 'Jerry did all the public relations; he was fabulous. We were sincere in the beginning. I wasn't cynical in the beginning. We had meetings at the William Morris office and at [talent agent] Bert Allenberg's house. We told them, "Here's our trick. We're not entitled to anything. We've got a distribution company; we've got Howard Hughes. We want the best in the world—Huston, Kazan, etc. We'll do everything we can to give them full autonomy: it will be the studio that United Artists was supposed to be . . ." That's what we meant to do. But we could never get Hughes on the phone, we just couldn't get any decisions from him, and it didn't take the Morris office and other people long to catch on that we might mean well but we couldn't deliver. But Hughes hired us at a time when he had a lot of pictures that had to be cut or to have things inserted. We did that for him as favours: mostly Wald, who would come in at five o'clock in the morning. For

three or four months we were busy; after about six months more, I saw it was hopeless and I was back playing golf.'

Throughout the 50s Krasna kept up his association with Wald, the effervescent writer-producer said to be one of the models for Budd Schulberg's Sammy Glick. It was Wald who, in 1960, produced *Let's Make Love*. The director was George Cukor; and the film, a quintessential Krasna parable, turned into a textbook case of what can go wrong with a movie when everything seems to be going right.

'I'm always looking for themes,' Krasna said. 'Ideas come from funny places. I go to the Writers Guild awards and George Burns and Gracie Allen bring on Burt Lancaster, or someone like that, and they do a dance. Everybody applauds. Lancaster can't dance. I think to myself, Why such a big hand? Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly wouldn't have got such a big hand for such a lousy dance. It's a dog walking on its hind legs. That's my slant. If they are going to laugh at someone inept, how am I going to dramatise someone inept? And I work backwards from that.'

Krasna's notion was to build the story around an impersonation, to place someone in a show business situation where applause was required not because the act was any good but because of who the

performer was. 'I get one of the very, very rich fellows. His press agent says: "Down in the Village, they are doing imitations, something about you and girls . . ." Pretend it's Howard Hughes, though I had in mind Jock Whitney [the financier]. "If you took a look and asked them to soften it, that's the only way to deal with these people . . ." He gets in his Rolls and goes downtown. He's fascinated by the impersonations—Eisenhower, the Whitneys, Howard Hughes. He has been spoiled all his life; there's a very attractive girl dancing in the show. When it comes to picking someone from the audience for a joke, they pick him. He's embarrassed, he doesn't look too good, but he's fascinated by the girl. And everybody's laughing at him. That's the whole story.'

'The trick is, look at the span I take. You want to be loved for yourself alone. That's my big theme. He doesn't know what to do. He has only been introduced to people who fall backwards over his diamond bracelets. So he'd like to win her by himself on her own territory. If you are a majority stockholder in the American Tobacco Company, you get Jack Benny to teach you how to do a routine, you get Gene Kelly to teach you how to dance. (He can't turn left, only right.) Now I have an excuse to show a guy doing all that stuff. Finally, of course, she finds out who he really is.'

'I explain this to Jerry Wald. I write the picture. "Now," I say, "we should limit the casting to one of three people:

Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart, Gregory Peck. We need people who are shit-kickers. Remember, I need the dog who walks on his hind legs. Well, we get Peck. He comes to the house every day for five days and we go over every line. Real gentleman. He changed twenty words—and he kept apologising. At the end we shook hands and he said: “This I promise you, we won’t change one more

word.” I kiss him goodbye and my wife goes ahead to Europe.

‘Wald calls up. “What a break! We can get Marilyn Monroe.” Monroe is tremendous, but she’s not what I had in mind. I was thinking of a musical comedy star like Cyd Charisse, who’s kind of a lady. You would believe those two together, Gregory Peck and Cyd Charisse. There’s class to it. But, Monroe’s so darling,

who’s to say she isn’t an asset? I tell the story to Marilyn in her hotel suite. She loves it, kisses goodbye and I go to Europe. More phone calls from Jerry Wald: “Peck, when I told him, said Okay, but no changes in the script. Arthur Miller, however, thinks it needs some changes . . .” Now Peck’s out. Marilyn’s in, but we’ve lost Peck.

‘The start of production got closer. Wald calls: “By God, would you believe it, we’ve got Yves Montand.” I said: “Hold it. You remember the whole scheme was the dog walking. Montand gives concerts. He sings and dances.” Wald says: “The motion picture audience doesn’t know that.” I say: “Jerry, it’s not important that they don’t know it. I need a whole generation of people who have seen him shit-kicking. Stewart, Cooper and Peck, you *know* can’t sing and dance. Not Montand.” Wald says: “If not Montand, we haven’t a chance. I called to tell you we’ve got him for the picture, but the truth is she wants him badly. She’s stuck on him.”

‘So . . . the picture didn’t get such great notices, although it will look better ten years from now. It is a very well-mounted picture of its kind. But, the gimmick that started it—*genius* is the word I mean when I say gimmick: gimmick is not a word to be sneered at—is Lancaster trying to sing, Lancaster getting all those laughs by dancing so badly . . . No use my telling people how good *Let’s Make Love* might have been.’



Let's Make Love: Yves Montand, Wilfrid Hyde-White.

You write motion pictures

Krasna lived in Switzerland for twenty years, still writing plays but effectively cut off from the new Hollywood. The new boys might be producing variations on his acknowledged classics (*Trading Places* was pure Krasna), but the young producers didn’t want the old-timers. In any case, the tightly crafted, three-act screenplay had become virtually a thing of the past.

‘When we did a story,’ Krasna said, ‘it had a *theme*. Usually it was the same one: they didn’t sleep together until the end of the picture. A happy ending; we were excited! When you’re committed to the skeleton of a beginning, a middle and an end, the skill is in concealing the skeleton. It’s a cliché, but you have to surprise the audience with what they expect. They want to know which way the story is going, you have to anticipate what they want, and the trick is in how you lead them to it. That means you would have truly rather dull patches, if you weren’t clever enough to pep everything up, but the story had to have an inevitability about it. The big change in storytelling now is that writers have given up the theme. Never mind The End. You see the most wonderful pictures . . . scenes are just great. Then suddenly the crawl, the end credit roll, comes. I didn’t expect the crawl for another ten minutes. They haven’t resolved anything. But, you know, they

haven’t got any dull periods. People are accustomed to it. You go out to see this picture, which doesn’t add up and is about nothing, and they say, “I didn’t like the ending, but . . .”

‘Television has taken up the notion of a beginning, a middle and an end. I am fascinated. It’s child’s play now. I’ll look at *M*A*S*H*, *Alice* or *The Jeffersons* every time I put my feet up. I know the rules, but I couldn’t do it as well. They are witty and inventive. But when you are talking about a whole movie, I believe that TV has used up all the plot twists and you need something stark and wild. Maybe the art form has advanced. But if I were Vermeer, I would be sick to my stomach that Jackson Pollock is making all this money. I would say: “Let me see you do a thumb.” My masters were Lubitsch and Wilder. They may sometimes have made mistakes, but every shot, every frame had to mean something. Unless you have worked with someone like René Clair, you don’t understand the technique of these old-timers.

‘When Clair came to Hollywood, he was considered one of the world’s greatest directors. If I had a scene at a table and I wanted to cut underneath to show a couple playing footsie, he wouldn’t allow it. “Why did the camera go under the table?” he would ask. “What do you mean?” I’d reply. “The camera went

down there . . .” “No,” he says. “Something has to fall off the table . . . and I have to have a tick, a thread which has already been established.” All the finger points, the wonderful chess game, that’s what I like. It doesn’t work that way now . . . People are professional writers because they wear steel-rimmed glasses and look like writers and have a list of credits. You can live a whole life as a writer in Hollywood without ever having *written* a movie and still be considered one of the great ones.

‘I claim that if you have been in the business thirty or forty years, what ought to stick out are the pictures which reflect you and your experiences. You may only have had two or three or four; but you’re a writer, you write motion pictures. To make a living at adapting is a big trick, but out of thirty or forty years, goddamnit, didn’t you write anything that is *yours*? I belittle the writer who takes a great book and adapts it. Is that all? I think I wrote what showed me off—romantic comedies. They were never the big, big pictures, but they were mine. At the end of the whole picture, I am the hero’s witness.’

Norman Krasna died on 1 November 1984, a week shy of his 75th birthday. According to *Variety*, ‘He had not been in ill health and had played golf the day before.’

Adapted from *Backstory: Interviews with Screenwriters of Hollywood’s Golden Age*, edited by Patrick McGilligan, forthcoming from the University of California Press, 1986.

The Department of Film
of The Museum of Modern Art, New York
TRADITIONS
Part Two of **BRITISH FILM**



Jessie Matthews in *Evergreen*, 1934

"The Musical and Comedy Tradition"

Opens in late December 1985 in The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1.

This exhibition is presented as a joint project of the Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art, and the National Film Archive, British Film Institute, on the occasion of their 50th anniversaries.

BRITISH FILM is sponsored by Pearson, and Goldcrest Films and Television, with additional support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, The Roy and Niuta Titus Fund, and the British Council, London.

Hollywood has never been short of gossip and rumour. Much of it has been perpetuated by hungry columnists and hagiographers writing at one or several removes from their subjects; half-truths at 24 frames per second. Neither is Hollywood short of autobiographies by stars, directors and producers, all anxious to sell copies, all determined to protect ego, all mindful of the next potential project. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

While serious historians such as Kevin Brownlow, David Robinson and Richard Schickel have painstakingly recreated the off-screen dramas of *Napoleon*, *The Gold Rush* and *The Birth of a Nation* from interviews, memoranda and call-sheets, first-hand documentary accounts by the principal participants in a film are rare. As examples of this underworked genre, Steven Bach's *Final Cut: Dreams and Disasters in the Making of Heaven's Gate* and John Boorman's *Money Into Light: The Emerald Forest, A Diary* are to be warmly welcomed.

In a foreword to Boorman's book, Philip French recalls F. Scott Fitzgerald's remark to D. W. Griffith that the most interesting subject for the movies is the movie business itself. This is perhaps only true of those handful of films which run into monumental difficulties, and these belong uniquely to Hollywood where the business cannot be separated from the art and where, indeed, the business is an art. How many agents have been heard to say, 'The picture was terrible but the deal was beautiful'? The Academy might consider introducing a new Oscar category: Best Deal of the Year.

Heaven's Gate escalated from an original budget estimate of \$7.5 million to a \$44 million write-off, received some vitriolic reviews, was abruptly withdrawn from distribution, was reissued in

Dear Diary

Adrian Turner

a shorter version and failed again, and forced the sale of United Artists to MGM. The making of *The Emerald Forest* was perhaps less seismic in cost and effect, but Boorman's tale is just as instructive and revealing. The two books represent the view from both sides of the studio executive's desk. Bach and Boorman both kept diaries, as if each knew that the next three years would be unusual, that they might have a story to tell.

Steven Bach's perspective is that of an ambitious executive, recently elevated to joint Head of Production at United Artists. Bach and his colleague, David Field, were out to make names for themselves and were faced with the fact that UA lacked a major release for Christmas 1979. Andy Albeck, UA's President, calls them 'locomotives'—blockbusters with an earning potential of \$100 million, 'the Holy Grail we are all chasing,' as Bach says. On the table were two possible locomotives, David Lean's two-part *Bounty* and Michael

Cimino's project, which was then called *The Johnson County War*. The Lean film was turned down and Bach notes that his first official act, 'a fairly routine one at that, had been to make the deal that would destroy the company.'

Although *Final Cut* is not exactly a love letter to Cimino, Bach does not conceal his own errors. Bach and UA were courting Cimino like teenage fans. *The Deer Hunter* had not been released but they sensed it would turn Cimino into a star (which it did) and they wanted him before another studio signed a deal. *Heaven's Gate* in any version (and Cimino drafted several, including an all-star one in the manner of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*) always seemed a problem to UA but they wanted Cimino more than the movie. They also wanted him for Christmas 1979.

United Artists clearly under-estimated Cimino's ambition; after all, *Heaven's Gate* was only a Western. During the early negotiations, Cimino comes across as a gifted tactician, aloof when he needs to be, impassioned when he needs to be, never conciliatory. He stage manages an audition in Paris for Isabelle Huppert (whom UA had never heard of and didn't want when they did), demands a more realistic budget and refuses to be held responsible if he fails to deliver on time. Bach and company cave in to every demand. Indeed, UA fuels the fire, pumping more money into the film, engineering a locomotive. When *Heaven's Gate* started shooting on 16 April 1979, the budget was \$15 million and doubtless the director knew that a Christmas release was impossible. Instead, he settles down to create 'the poetry of America'.

By 27 April Bach is faced with three options: the *Cleopatra* option (letting things run their course), the *Apocalypse Now* option (take a firmer hand) and the *Queen Kelly* option (abort the mission). They do nothing and eventually reach a fourth option (replacing Cimino, and Bach presents a clue-filled scene with his

Money Into Light, by John Boorman, Faber and Faber/£4.95

Final Cut, by Steven Bach, Jonathan Cape/£12.95, published 31 October.

Heaven's Gate: Vilmos Zsigmond, Michael Cimino.



unnamed choice of replacement) and a fifth option, after which Cimino agrees to hurry up.

The key moment in the book is when Bach and Field go to Cimino's remote location for a showdown. An argument breaks out and the director retires angrily to his improvised cutting room. After a while Bach follows him and, without a word, Cimino allows Bach a first glimpse of *Heaven's Gate*. United Artists' money is turned into light and Bach describes the footage as 'thrilling'. He reports to Albeck, 'It looks like David Lean decided to make a Western.'

But a few months later, after viewing the first five-hour-20-minute version of *Michael Cimino's Heaven's Gate* (Bach's italics), after press stories that embarrass UA and its owning company Transamerica, Bach has come to loathe every frame of it. Every minute, it seems, is a monument to UA's impotence and Bach's inability to control a 'freaking Academy Award auteur'. Cimino had to be made a scapegoat for a more general malaise (costs on *Raise the Titanic*, *Reds* and *Moonraker* were also skyrocketing above Cimino's budget) and his deliberate remoteness and poor relations with the press (caused mainly by his refusal to talk to them) contributed to the public crucifixion.

Bach presents a vivid yet depressing picture of an executive's life. Most of it is spent on the telephone, in airplanes, at meetings. He's amazed when he finds time to see a movie. Aside from *Heaven's Gate*, which was just one movie in UA's schedule, Bach writes memorable accounts of Martin Scorsese, Woody Allen, Blake Edwards and Peter Sellers. He is candid in his misjudgments (turning down *Chariots of Fire* and '10') and modest in his successes. *Final Cut* is a book about failure that is free of bitterness. It will make a great mini-series.

John Boorman's perspective is that of the beleaguered film-maker whose ambitions are solely for the film in hand and two others he is simultaneously overseeing. Like *Final Cut*, this is a tale of betrayal and obsession but has the novelty of a happy ending. Inevitably, the diary of the making of *The Emerald Forest* comes to resemble a Boorman picture. It is a quest, a voyage of self-discovery that becomes heroic and mythic. Its parameters are civilisation and barbarism, between the Brazilian rain forest and the city, the law of the jungles of the Amazon, Hollywood and Wardour Street.

The diary is also an ordnance survey map of Boorman's mind, and anyone contemplating a critical essay on the oeuvre might now think it a redundant exercise. In particular, there is an extraordinary scene when Boorman stays with the Kamairá Indians, an experience which triggers a distant memory when the 16-year-old Boorman goes by kayak up the Thames to Runnymede where he disturbs those placid, historic waters. 'That experience,' writes Boorman, 'so profound, sent me



The Emerald Forest: John Boorman.

searching for images, through cinema, to try to recapture what I knew that day.' Like Cimino, inspired by his location, Boorman becomes enthralled by the spirit of the forest. Slowly, he discovers his own movie.

After drawing a blank in Los Angeles, Boorman is invited to lunch by Richard Attenborough and David Puttnam. They want him to join them on the board of Goldcrest, which they describe as a British film-makers' Camelot. Although Puttnam is 'a little too good to be true' and Attenborough is 'redeemed by a true goodness of heart', Boorman is swept up by their enthusiasm. If Attenborough and Puttnam were vying for the mantle of King Arthur, Boorman becomes an unwitting Mordred. Boorman reminds us that Goldcrest's slogan was 'Fulfilling the Promise'. A month before shooting started, after spending \$4 million, Goldcrest decides that *The Emerald Forest* will be one promise they will not fulfil.

Apart from Boorman himself, the hero of *Money Into Light* is Jake Eberts, then Goldcrest's founding father and Chief Executive and a movie buff, a rare quality among executives. It is Eberts who works out the financial and distribution deals, leaving Boorman to prepare the locations and assemble the cast and crew. But Eberts is later lured to Hollywood and Goldcrest take fright at *The Emerald Forest*, sensing a spiralling budget stemming from the uncertainty of the location. Boorman had also dismayed Goldcrest and Eberts by casting his own son, Charley, in the major role and subjecting him to a form of paternal rite and ritual, a journey into manhood, that the Kamairá would have approved of. *The Emerald Forest* became an \$18 million home movie.

When Goldcrest announced their

withdrawal—Boorman assumes that the new Chairman, James Lee, as well as Attenborough and Puttnam voted against him—the director was in Brazil, coping with logistical problems, illness, snakes, spiders and plane journeys right out of *Only Angels Have Wings*. Fortunately, Eberts comes to the rescue and Goldcrest obligingly bridge the financial gap until Embassy Pictures take the controls. The shooting of the picture is beset with problems vividly described.

Boorman is a fine, imagistic writer and *Money Into Light* is an adroit blend of hard information, mysticism, anthropology and anecdote. His stories of producers and directors—of himself and Lew Grade, when Boorman ended with a cheque for £250,000 up his backside; a meeting between Antonioni and Dino De Laurentiis; how Stanley Kubrick delays making decisions—provide comic but revealing interludes. Finally, it is a testament to all directors who work with dedicated crews but work alone.

At the heart of both books lie the problems, as well as the rewards, of sponsoring 'visionary' artists. A studio does not engage the services of a John Boorman or a Michael Cimino (or a Kubrick, Coppola or Lean) without some expectation of flexibility in terms of the concept and the budget. A studio expects professionalism (and Bach notes how hard-working and efficient was the Cimino unit) and gets a certain amount of prestige and the virtual guarantee of releasing something distinctive, an 'event' or a locomotive. There is no doubt that a J. Lee Thompson or a Norman Jewison could probably have made these films in half the time for half the money, but the results would not have been John Boorman's *The Emerald Forest* or Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*. They

are exhilarating pieces of *cinema*, in which every cent, I would argue, has found its way on to the screen.

The studio's obligation is to fulfil the promise and release the picture, but UA never gave *Heaven's Gate* a chance, even though its seven-day run in New York was a sell-out. United Artists might have remembered the first release of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which cost considerably more than its original budget, survived the apprehensions of a constantly changing MGM board, received generally negative reviews, was hastily shortened by twenty minutes, but allowed to play and discover an audience. Like *2001*, *Heaven's Gate* is a non-narrative film and its audaciousness—for a blockbuster—caught UA and the critics unawares. *Heaven's Gate* disappeared because that was the only option available to Bach and his colleagues; it preserved their authority, their credibility as executives in the eyes of other executives, and it forced the sale of UA to MGM.*

Because of publishers' deadlines, both books lack their ironic postscripts. *The Emerald Forest* was shown at the Cannes Festival in May and has since opened in France and America to critical acclaim and outstanding business. As Boorman's film was opening in America, Goldcrest suffered a major boardroom crisis, losing its Chairman (James Lee) and Chief Executive (Sandy Lieberman). On 2 August, Richard Attenborough was appointed Chairman (thus increasing his as yet unanalysed power in British film and TV production), and Jake Eberts is to return as Chief Executive. One aspect of the crisis was the escalating costs of three of Goldcrest's current productions—*Absolute Beginners*, Puttnam and Joffé's *The Mission*, which was shooting in difficult conditions in South America, and Hugh Hudson's *Revolution*, which has gone a reported £6 million over budget.

None of the executives who played major roles in *Final Cut* is still operating: 'Steven Bach wrote this book' is the author's own subsequent history. But Michael Cimino has a new film, an ambitious and powerful thriller called *Year of the Dragon* which was financed by Dino De Laurentiis. In America it is distributed by MGM/UA and throughout the summer of 1985 the most ironic sight in Hollywood was the studio's enormous hoarding advertising Cimino's film. After a string of flops, MGM/UA is now relying on the director of *Heaven's Gate* to turn the tide. *Year of the Dragon* is a locomotive and its existence proves that executives very quickly run out of steam. ■

*Bach also notes the re-launch of the original version of *Heaven's Gate* at the NPT in August 1983, when Cimino's film was hailed as a masterpiece by many critics. Bach gets the number of NPT showings wrong (there were nine, not six) but more importantly states that the subsequent West End run did not stimulate a wider release. The fact that the film is only available in 70mm severely restricts its potential and in America requests from cinemas to show the film have been turned down.

ALICE AND John Pym

A good tea is laid out on the grass. The imperious Mrs Liddell (Jane Asher) surveys the scene. Her daughters, Lorina, Alice and Edith, and two sprawling undergraduates, Baker and Hargreaves, are ranged around her. It is a summer afternoon in Oxford in the 1860s. The river glides. Only Mr Dodgson appears uncomfortable. He has already had occasion to pull up Hargreaves for carelessly mentioning the name of the divinity. Would the sporting young men with their gigantic appetites, Mrs Liddell asks, like more to eat? They decline, easily, their eyes on the girls. Another scone for Mr Dodgson? He might manage another (easier than refusing), only to be told rather peremptorily to help himself.

It is time for entertainment: who will recite? Mrs Liddell knows the order of things. The girls will not. Mr Dodgson will, perhaps, tell a story. Yes, Lorina says, something out of your *masterpiece*. Mr Dodgson has performed on other occasions. Eager to please—and especially to please Alice—Mr Dodgson (Ian Holm) rises and begins to recite the Song of the Mock Turtle, 'The Lobster Quadrille'. The girls dissolve into giggles, the ungallant young men can barely contain themselves. Mrs Liddell, although knowing Mr Dodgson and his affection for Alice and resolved to keep a very close eye on him, is pursued in silent disapproval. Poor Mr Dodgson begins to stutter and cannot finish. He mops his face with a pocket handkerchief and sits down.

That afternoon has stayed with Alice, now, many years later, the widow Hargreaves, a tetchy old lady of nearly eighty; stayed to haunt her. She is crossing the Atlantic on the S.S. *Berengaria*. The river of her childhood was placid, so soporifically placid that it seemed worthy of flicking in the face of the besotten Mr Dodgson. The Atlantic is ominously dark, the illuminated liner filled with gay passengers, a sort of beacon against the times, the depressed 1930s. Mrs Hargreaves, however, is no longer in a playful mood: her pleasure now is an old woman's satisfaction in stifling the happiness of Lucy, her dazed young companion, who on the night before docking would like nothing better than simply to watch the dancers.

It is the centenary of Mr Dodgson's—Lewis Carroll's—birth. Alice, his inspiration, has been invited to Columbia University to accept an honorary degree: but it was so long ago; she feels a bit of a sham. All this fuss—abrasive newspapermen, too ignorant to know who Mr

Dodgson was, insisting on familiarity, proffering vulgar stuffed rabbits—to honour what? A little girl, not preserved in amber, but grown up and grown slightly cynical (two sons lost in France), in a different age with everything irrevocably changed.

She still, though, has a sense of what is required of her. Does she have a message for the children of America, a newswoman wants to know. She is bombarded with other questions before she can reply. But she has been properly brought up and, having given a crisp answer to why she is in New York, goes on: 'I am asked if I have any message for the children. I do, indeed I do. I hope they will more successfully learn than you appear to have done how to address their elders with respect. I hope, too, they will say their prayers before getting into bed, that they will sit up straight at the dinner table and always keep their hands and faces spotlessly clean . . . and read sensible books in a light good enough not to damage their eyes and yet not so harsh as entirely to remove the shadows from the corners of the room.'

When, during her *Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice is led along the beach by the Gryphon to meet the piteously sighing Mock Turtle, she is moved to ask: 'What is his sorrow?' To which the Gryphon replies: 'It's all his fancy, that: he hasn't got no sorrow, you know.' *Dreamchild*, the story of Alice in New York and what she found there, is made by the old team (their first venture together into feature films proper) of writer Dennis Potter, director Gavin Millar and co-producer Kenith Trodd. It begins with this moment on the seashore, an old lady's troubled ocean dream. Perched on the rocks are two creations of the Jim Henson Creature Shop; the voice of the Mock Turtle is Alan Bennett's, the Gryphon Fulton Mackay's. In between them, however, stands not a little girl but the elderly Mrs Hargreaves (Coral Browne).

'When we were little,' the Mock Turtle begins, having been asked for his history, 'we went to school in the sea.' 'Absoblooming-lutely,' the Gryphon interjects, the authentic, rasping tone of Dennis Potter. 'The master was an old Turtle—we used to call him Tortoise—' 'Why,' Alice asks, 'did you call him Tortoise, if he wasn't one?' 'We called him Tortoise because he taught us; really you are very dull!' Mr Dodgson, tutor of mathematics, did not instruct Alice; he did better than that, he entertained her, tirelessly. Why then the dreams, the restless discontent?

THE MOCK TURTLE



Amelia Shankley (Alice) and Ian Holm (Mr Dodgson).

Dreamchild, a Pennies from Heaven production in association with Thorn EMI, is in outline a simple story. Mrs Hargreaves disembarks in New York and is installed at the Waldorf Astoria. A young journalist, Jack Dolan, recently sacked by his newspaper for concocting an interview with Lindbergh ('That's what Lindbergh *would* have said, if he'd talked to me'), spies the chance to put other words into the mouth of another celebrity. He bamboozles his way into her suite, sweeping Lucy off her feet in the process, and spoons on some flattery. Having once herself played along an older admirer, Mrs Hargreaves allows herself a smile at the practised skill of another young person in playing her along.

Mrs Hargreaves perks up considerably when it appears that the problem of what she is to say at Columbia can be temporarily postponed—and money earned to boot—by some cunning commercial endorsements. How Mrs Liddell would have frozen at the thought of dear Alice in the role of 'some sort of tradesperson'; how Mr Dodgson would have delighted (perhaps) at the thought of Alice in a radio studio in a fantastic city with a man from Barnet knocking coconut shells on his head for sound effects, reading some gibberish script about soap or soda pop. The problem for Alice Liddell, now Mrs Hargreaves, is to reconcile herself with the memory of the mother whom she has grown to resemble, the mother whose silent disapproval

ended in her burning Alice's letters from Mr Dodgson; and how to reconcile herself with what, exactly, the nice but faintly ludicrous Mr Dodgson wanted from her or wished for her.

Jack warms to his task as Mrs Hargreaves' agent. (You can always tell when he's talking about money, Lucy observes. 'His lips go all wet.' Potter is, as usual, good on money; and the film is also punctuated to effect with his beloved popular songs and brilliantined crooners.) Mrs Hargreaves takes to bullying Lucy mercilessly. Even stooping to make the wretched girl eat a cafeteria meal she has been picking over because she, her mistress, paid for it (even though, it may be noted, she herself is being showered with pennies from heaven).

Years ago, with Mr Dodgson, she was just as tyrannical: though then she was more subtle and then her victim was pleased to pay any price for the pleasure of her company. Jack, however, is a gentleman, finds he has lost his heart to the orphaned waif and stands by her. The light begins to dawn, and Mrs Hargreaves realises that being polite is not just a one-way process, the old also have obligations to the young. She apologises to Lucy. That evening she works up her Columbia speech with Jack and acknowledges that she has, at least, always been able to recognise love. The young couple have her blessing. The robed dignitaries assemble on the platform.

The past, however, will not go away.

What was the Mock Turtle's sorrow? For he surely was sad, despite what the Gryphon said. The red-eyed Mad Hatter and the broken-toothed Rabbit come back to trouble her: the Dormouse getting the worst of it again at this other tea party. The creatures which *she* made famous—and is there some sort of poetic justice in that fame has turned them into gross caricatures in New York City?—flit in and out of her waking dreams. Her childhood also comes back.

Amelia Shankley's Alice is strikingly pretty and strikingly self-composed. Her good looks no doubt saw her right with the athletic Mr Hargreaves, but it was her self-composure which saved her from the sometimes perilous adventures through which Mr Dodgson put her with his awkward, argumentative creations. Alice, it seems, is something of a know-it-all. 'Half a league, half a league . . . ' 'Yes, Alice, don't show off,' Mrs Liddell wearily admonishes. 'We all know "The Charge of the Light Brigade".' She was disputatious and a bit of a pedant. She delighted in riddles. She said her prayers, sat up straight, had spotless hands and, no doubt, read sensible books. She addressed her elders with respect; and yet her politeness to Mr Dodgson was a mischievous politeness.

Dreamchild is, in a sense, most at home in these Oxford passages. Billy Williams photographs many an Oxford cliché: but his composition is so calm and immaculate that for once the beauty does not seem touristic and excessive. Lowering New York is either faintly surreal, a huge poster outside a rain-swept night-time diner, or faintly theatrical, the newspaper office is pure *Front Page*. The past returns, however, as the irrelevant details of youth are said to return in old age, with greater clarity than the present. And what returns, chiefly, is the evidence of Alice's heartless treatment of Mr Dodgson.

The very soul of pleasantness, surface pleasantness, she nevertheless contrives to ruin Mr Dodgson's photographs of her by skipping out of his darkroom at the crucial moment (accidentally, but then there are no accidents). She *almost* leaves behind the beautifully bound presentation copy of his masterpiece. It was the presentation copy of presentation copies; and Mr Dodgson tried not to show how much the giving of it meant to him. She mimics his stutter to her sisters, the stutter which, of course, disappears when he begins to entertain her, and she at last, all pretences dropped, falls under the wholly innocent spell of his

imagination. She looks at him, straight, and she knows, without really knowing, what he wants but cannot have.

On the Columbia platform, however, all comes right. She must say something about Mr Dodgson's gift to her. The Oxford afternoon returns: not the famous one on which Mr Dodgson first told the story of Alice in Wonderland, and which he fixed in the poem which opens the version of it he subsequently jotted down and published, but that infamous one when the Liddell sisters mocked him. Mr Dodgson sits mopping his face, an embarrassed silence falls—to be broken by the Columbia choir, open-faced American young men (one with a perfect Carrollian face): 'Will yer, won't yer . . . will yer, won't yer . . .' The sublime 'Lobster Quadrille': 'There's a paw-poise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.' The stutter is picked up and transformed, the song at last completed, and Alice at last finds the words to acknowledge Mr Dodgson's love. Beside the river she stands up, approaches Mr Dodgson, kisses him and lays her head on his chest.

Alice, it seems, has been everywhere in recent months. Disney re-released on videocassette their neglected Alice cartoon (see SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1985). Last Christmas, Gilbert Adair, a contributor to this magazine, published a third, alphabetical Adventure—*Through the Needle's Eye*—which Macmillan, Carroll's publisher, issued as a companion to, rather than a pastiche of, the originals. Earlier this summer, Alan Bennett could be heard reading an abridged *Alice in Wonderland* on the morning radio. Then at the National Film Theatre in July there was a season of Jonathan Miller's work; his *Alice in Wonderland*, produced by BBC TV in 1966, proved so popular that a repeat was scheduled.

Looking back at Miller's production, designed by Julia Trevelyan Oman in her best cluttered Victorian manner and generously photographed in black and white by Dick Bush, one got an unmistakable whiff of the 60s: the decade of the magic mushroom, when Alice could feature not only as the proprietress of a fantastic restaurant but, in her true colours, as the subject of a coded hit pop song. Miller's production (the stars seem to have fallen over themselves to be cast) is set in a sort of semi-rural madhouse; and even the gibbering maid brushing the *real* Alice's hair seems not entirely all there. The Tea Party, with Peter Cook the Hatter, Michael Gough the Hare and Wilfred Lawson the most mouselike of Dormice, is not the sinister recollection of Mrs Hargreaves' dream, but a wonderfully attenuated discourse between three abstracted lunatics.

John Gielgud, the Mock Turtle, is propped up on a pebbly beach against a cliff in which there must surely be fossils as Malcolm Muggeridge, the Gryphon, leads up Alice, something of a crosspatch, to hear his history. There is no equivalent of Potter's cynical, vernacular interjection here: this Mock Turtle is allowed



Coral Browne (Mrs Hargreaves) with the director Gavin Millar.

to list, as he is not in *Dreamchild*, the full catalogue of ridiculous subjects he took at the school in the ocean under the Turtle schoolmaster. One hears, through Gielgud, Mr Dodgson spiriting up the absurdities for Alice's amusement. The tide is out and, after he and the Gryphon have finished, they are seen in a beautiful long shot dancing merrily among the pools, with Alice trailing behind: '“Will you walk a little faster?” said a whiting to a snail . . .’

Dreamchild ends on the dark beach.

Mr Dodgson has taken the place of the Mock Turtle. His face is buried in his hands. 'What is his sorrow?' young Alice asks the Gryphon. 'Ah, it's all his fancy, that,' the Gryphon replies. 'He hasn't got any sorrow.' Mr Dodgson peeps between his fingers and smiles at the little girl. They both laugh. No giggles now. 'Ah, for God's sake shut up,' the Gryphon expostulates. The curmudgeon is given the last word; but at the same time he is also, in a sense, laughed right out of court. ■

Alice and the Mock Turtle.



BLUE DOLPHIN



FILM DISTRIBUTORS



WHEN FATHER WAS AWAY ON BUSINESS

Director Emir Kusturica
Starring Moreno de Bartoli, Miki Manojlovic
Winner of the Palme d'Or and International Critics Award Cannes '85



COLONEL REDL

Director Istvan Szabo
Starring Klaus Maria Brandauer (Best actor — Budapest Festival)
Winner of Jury Prize, Cannes '85 'Best Film' Budapest Festival.
Winner of 'Golden Band' top German Film Award

Careful

Director Carl Schultz
Starring Wendy Hughes, Robyn Nevin, Nicholas Gledhill. Winner of 8 major Australian Awards

LE COP

Director Claude Zidi
Starring Phillipe Noiret, Thierry Lhermitte
Winner of 3 French Oscars — Best Film, Director, Editor

PALACE PICTURES 16mm Library

THE Coca-Cola KID

Director Dusan Makavejev
Starring Eric Roberts, Greta Scacchi

The story of life, death, sex and the universe... relatively speaking.

Grand Prix technical merit Cannes '85

INSIGNIFICANCE

Director Nicolas Roeg
Starring Gary Busey, Tony Curtis, Michael Emil, Theresa Russell

NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

Director Wes Craven
Starring John Saxon, Ronee Blakely

From Kirby to the Kremlin, this is a fresh love...

LETTER TO BREZHNEV

Director Chris Bernard
Starring Alfred Molina, Peter Firth, Maggie Clarke, Alexandra Pigg
Written by Frank Clarke

THE ELEMENT OF CRIME

by Lars Von Trier, Michael Elphick, Esmond Knight



The Flamingo Kid

Director Gary Marshall
Starring Matt Dillon

Virgin 16mm library

Written, Directed and Edited by JOHN SAYLES
Starring JOE MORTON, TOM WRIGHT, CAROLINE AARON

THE Brother From Another Planet

FRANCESCO ROSI's film of BIZET's

CARMEN

STARRING...
JULIA MIGENES-JOHNSON
PLACIDO DOMINGO

"ONE OF THE MOST THRILLING AND BEAUTIFUL FILMS EVER TO REACH THE SCREEN" FILM REVIEW

NORMAL PEOPLE TAKE NORMAL HOLIDAYS... —FRAN DIDN'T!

She'll be Wearing Pink Pyjamas

THE OFFICIAL VERSION

Director Luis Puenzo
Starring Hector Alterio & Norma Aleandro



STARRING...
JULIE WALTERS
ANTHONY HIGGINS



BLUE DOLPHIN FILMS



SURVIVORS

THE BLUES TODAY



"A MASTERPIECE" "GLORIOUS" Standard

"NOT TO BE MISSED" City Limits

JAMES MASON AVA GARDNER "ALBERT LEWIN'S"

PANDORA and the FLYING DUTCHMAN

SUBURBIA

A film by PENELOPE SPHEERIS

"THE BEST FILM OF THE WEEK" Newsweek

"THE BRIGHTEST NEW TALENT IN AMERICAN FILMS" Newsweek

RUSSELL CHAMBERS, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON WC2E 8AA. TEL: 240 9891



The Emerald Forest: Charley Boorman (Tommy).

Mixed magic

The Emerald Forest/Richard Combs

Man in nature? Figures in a landscape? Strangers in a strange land? Alice in Wonderland? The problem with John Boorman's odysseys is that they seem to operate in a realm of such high seriousness—to have such stylistic confidence and such a serene, detached sense of life on this planet—that it always comes as a surprise when they dip into self-amused or totally unaware absurdity. Perhaps it is the quality of the detachment: Boorman often looks less like an explorer than a visitor, as if he were skimming in from outer space, roving briefly over the territory, then forming his hypotheses out of an indiscriminate blend of myth and rumour, scientific research and popular wisdom. Boorman is as likely to begin with an intellectual abstraction then make it work like a potboiler as he is, in the approved manner of directors who 'transcend' their material (à la *Point Blank*), to do the opposite.

Boorman's speculations—on man against the system (*Point Blank*) or man against himself (*Deliverance*)—have occasionally taken off from clearly defined 'found' material. Where the basis is more nebulous or abstract fantasy, his own or others' (*Leo the Last, Zardoz*), then Boorman the visitor tends to run amok, quixotically mingling his popular with his recherché research materials. Could anything be more perverse (although more appealing than was generally allowed) than the decision to base an *Exorcist* sequel on Teilhard de Chardin? *The Emerald Forest* (Rank) is from this side of Boorman, although its basis is solidly 'found' material: the *fait divers* of an engineer's son who was

kidnapped by Amazon Indians and became a member of the tribe during the years in which his father doggedly searched for him. It even comes on initially like a replay of *Deliverance*, like that now common scenario (*Where the Green Ants Dream*) for the ecological disaster movie. 'Civilised' man has pushed up to the edge of the forest, his machineries poised to commit the hubris of throwing up another dam or such like.

The Emerald Forest takes its ecology seriously, and has the figures to prove it. Some 35 per cent of the world's oxygen is produced by the Amazon rain forest; the area of that forest is being reduced by thousands of acres a day; where four million Indians once lived, only 120,000 remain. 'They still know,' intones an end title, 'what we have forgotten.' As token and clichéd as that line sounds, it is characteristic of Boorman that he should use it not just to clinch his environmental argument but to unlock a whole spiritual landscape. De Chardin's concept of the 'universal mind', invoked in *The Heretic*, is reworked here; this is no ordinary folkloric excursion up the Amazon, but an attempt to represent animist beliefs, minds and spirits freely transmigrating between the animal and human worlds. It is also characteristic of Boorman that the representation should be unfussy and unembarrassed—comic-strip direct—and that this kind of seriousness should be fed through some mock-serious adventure. From the moment an arrow thwacks into a tree behind somebody's back, we could be in Saturday afternoon serial land. This is an ecological tract disguised as a Jungle Jim movie, or vice versa.

Between the spiritual states and the enthusiastic potboiling, in fact, the ethnographic connections are rather perfunctory. Or it's ethnography made easy. At any rate, Tommy Markham (the director's son, Charley Boorman) makes a remarkably painless transition from the white boy who is kidnapped by (or simply absorbed into) a tribe of Indians while playing near the dam project to the adolescent we discover ten years later. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, he has become as much an Indian as his dark-complected brothers. (Jungle Jim, children's story, Western—you could virtually take your pick of the adventures Boorman is compacting here.) There is pain in the initiation-into-manhood scene which shortly follows, although this of course could also be strictly from genre rather than ethnography (Tommy, or 'Tomme' in Amazonian, undergoes trial by ants instead of hanging by the pectorals as in *A Man Called Horse*). The boy's father, Bill (Powers Boothe), meanwhile fights the jungle and a more hostile tribe of Indians (they're divided into groups with names like the Invisible People, the Fierce People) to find his son. By chance, in the middle of a running battle, they suddenly confront one another, down the sights of bow and arrow and machine-gun. Be sure not to miss next week's exciting episode...

It's easy enough to be dismayed by the penny-dreadful aspect of this, though given the mixed magic of all Boorman's storytelling, his patchwork mythologies, it's also foolish to have expected anything else. What is more alarming is the way the adventure tale not only compromises any true interest in the Indians but becomes steadily more banal and objectionable in its own right. Once father and son have been reunited, the latter predictably elects to remain with the Invisible People rather than return home (the Indians have their own derisive terms for the white man's world: the 'land of the dead', inhabited by 'termites' who gnaw down all the trees). But despite this line in ethnographic chic, the film is quite atavistic in attributing blame, singling out a group of evil white traders (like a 'liberal' 50s Western) who supply the Fierce People with firearms and fire water, then persuade them to kidnap the young women of the Invisible People to become prostitutes. Bill Markham helps Tommy and his fellow tribesmen to reclaim the girls, after a shoot-out in a brothel (Peckinpah?) and the satisfying trouncing of the bad Indians by the good Indians.

By this point, the film's mixed magic has become a fairly irredeemable mish-mash. What perhaps makes it seem worse is Boorman's loss of what has always been his strongest metaphysical suit: his sense of humour. The duel of the last two men on earth in *Hell in the Pacific* is also a Laurel and Hardy tit-for-

tat; the architect of the future in *Zardoz* is a practical joker (Wi-Zard of Oz); and even the confrontation between Good and Evil in *The Heretic* has room for Ecumenical Edwards, who deals in everybody's ju-jus. Bill Markham does initially have a jester on his quest, a photographer (no journey into the heart

of darkness should be without one) who is quite sardonic about the whole business. But he falls early victim to the Fierce People, which also points up the movie's rather casually high body count. This would pass unnoticed on a Saturday afternoon, but looks wasteful in a film that is also about ecology. □

fierce efforts to change herself and the world only result in her insulating herself from it by privilege and power. She has 'plenty', but she has nothing.

Her breaking-point comes with Suez, when Brock's superior, Sir Leonard Darwin (John Gielgud), resigns from the service in revulsion. At a dinner party, not knowing of his action, Susan harangues him and her guests in a speech of extraordinary, broken eloquence, cementing the two images that haunt her, the shining past and the horrifying present. 'By and large we did make it our business to land in countries where we were wanted . . .' Streeep is at her best with this distraught, rancorous sarcasm, and it is this corrosive note that stops her from turning into a saint or martyr. She adds a strident egotism to the honest struggle to self-help that seems to be on the page, and this fierceness occasionally unbalances things.

Hare talks of his approach to the play and that of the original actress, Kate Nelligan: 'She acted it and I wrote it out of white hot anger with England.' He feels that he has cooled a bit now, and that working with Schepisi on the adaptation and rehearsal removed a few distortions in the original. Be that as it may, Streeep substitutes for the white hot anger with England a contempt for lying that sometimes comes close to heartless bitchery. Like *Licking Hitler* ('the 30-year-old deep, corrosive, national habit of lying') and *Wetherby* particularly, where no one tells the truth, *Plenty* is about dishonesty too. But when a working-class boyfriend, Mick (Sting), to whom Susan had gone, fruitlessly, for a baby, falls in love with her and is brutally rejected, are we meant to feel that Susan's distaste for the hypocrisy of

The habit of lying

Plenty/Gavin Millar

'Too bad that David Hare's play *Plenty*, premiered at the National in 1978, had to wait to be seen on Broadway before becoming a film. Too bad, also, if you're feeling sensitive about British Film Year, that this screenplay (by Hare) is presented by an American company (UKO), produced by two Americans (Edward R. Pressman and Joseph Papp) and (well) directed by an Australian (Fred Schepisi). All credit to them for picking up, and doing justice to, one of the few recent texts, in theatre or cinema, that undertakes an unpretentious but serious review of postwar Britain's decline. Perhaps it is part of the disease the film diagnoses that we hadn't the taste, the energy, the money or the courage to do the thing ourselves.

Hare's jeremiads about the British have been received with queasy approval. No one with any serious hopes for contemporary British writing can ignore him, yet what the devil is the chap saying about us? That we are a nation riddled with a snobbery and class-consciousness which two world wars have done nothing to shake; that, on the contrary, postwar 'levelling' has enabled qualities endemic to the ruling classes, such as hypocrisy, shallow feeling, greed, idleness and irresponsibility, to be spread more evenly lower down the social scale; that power is what an elite is excited by, and that as the elite loses its identity, or fears for its integrity, or suspects interlopers, then the fight for a hold on that power becomes ever more vicious. So, Sir Andrew Charleson, a mandarin at the 10, tells Susan Brock that when they had an empire to administer, there were 600 of them; now they have none, there are 6,000, and the fight for power becomes more urgent and uglier ('perhaps,' he adds, with that graceful withdrawal from commitment which Hare pounces on often enough). 'As our influence wanes,' Sir Andrew goes on, 'as our empire collapses, there is little to believe in. Behaviour is all.'

Plenty (Columbia-EMI-Warner) is an ambitious study in behaviour, principally of the young woman Susan Brock (Meryl Streeep), whom we first see as an SOE agent in France in 1943 and follow through twenty years to a drug-cushioned depression on the verge of the swinging 60s. It studies the behaviour of the nation as it emerges from the war,

coping with austerity, traditional jazz, Chinese restaurants, the Festival of Britain, the Coronation, Suez and its aftermath. Broad canvases tend to generality, fail, usually, to link the personal and the public convincingly. Hare's recourse is to a heroine either at the centre of the public event, or putting herself there by an act of intellect or will.

Thus our view of the Special Operations forces derives from that breathless and shuddering escapade of one night in a French village when a British agent, Lazar (Sam Neill), drops out of the skies. She shields him, falls in love with him and says goodbye to him, all in one night. How to relive the time, she complains later, when you saw someone for an hour or two, saw the very best of him, and moved on. It is Susan's misery that the intensity of that fearful time, combining ecstasy and self-sacrifice, can never be recaptured. She marries a correct, worthy diplomat, Raymond Brock (Charles Dance), and lacerates him for the false twists and turns her life takes, like a wounded snake trying to escape the goad. Do what she will, her

Plenty: Sting (Mick).



middle-class marriage has been carried a touch far? Don't we agree with Mick when he painfully turns on her and her promiscuous bohemian girlfriend Alice (Tracey Ullman): 'You people are cruel and dangerous. You fuck people up.'

It's a question whether Susan does that to others as much as they do it to her, especially her poor, dull, correct,

faithful, prudish, forlorn and abandoned Raymond, the door to the future closed in his face, sans teeth, sans job, sans everything; while she lies, abandoned by a dream from the past, codename Lazar, in a drugged fantasy on a rumpled bed in the Pembroke House Hotel, Nowhere-on-Sea. Which of them is the true image of England? □



Sylvester Stallone (Rambo).

'Do we get to win this time?'

Rambo/Kim Newman

The mutually parasitic relationship between American politics and the American cinema, of which the election of a former movie star to the White House is merely the most obvious symptom, reached an apotheosis of sorts in Ronald Reagan's off-the-cuff review of *Rambo—First Blood, Part II* (Columbia-EMI-Warner). 'After seeing *Rambo* last night,' the President remarked, in the aftermath of the Beirut hostage crisis, 'I'll know what to do next time this happens.' In Beirut, the American administration had refrained from military intervention. In *Rambo*, expedient-seeking politicians also adopt a 'softly, softly' approach to the equally knotty problem of the American nationals supposedly still held as prisoners of war by the Vietnamese, but the eponymous hero (Sylvester Stallone) takes it upon himself to disobey orders and mount a practically genocidal one-man rescue mission.

Marshall Murdock, the government man in charge of Rambo's undercover mission (the purpose of which is actually to get the administration off the hook by

proving that there are no American POWs in Vietnam), is played by Charles Napier, an actor whose ability to convey sweatiness, shiftiness and unscrupulousness is positively Nixonian. It is through Murdock that we learn why the Vietnamese are still hanging on to the Americans listed as 'Missing in Action', and why the administration would rather refuse to acknowledge their existence than negotiate for their release: the United States, Vietnam argues, still owes more than three billion dollars in war reparations. The situation in *Rambo* has basic emotive parallels with the events in Tehran in 1980 and Beirut in 1985. Having learned the lessons of President Carter's disastrous attempt to use *Mission: Impossible* tactics in Iran, Ronald Reagan has thus far, however, chosen to act more like Murdock, the only character in the Sylvester Stallone/James Cameron script who represents the government, than Rambo.

Ironically, the role of Colonel Trautman (Richard Crenna), the fatherly officer who trained Rambo as a killing machine and who now at the

start of Part II wants to rescue him from a prison wasteland, would thirty years ago have been an ideal Ronald Reagan part—eclipsed by the star but entrusted with the moral of the picture. Crenna is, in fact, physically and otherwise, exactly the sort of actor the President used to be. After Rambo has defeated what seems like the entire Vietnamese and Russian armies, and forced the duplicitous Murdock to devote himself to the diplomatic moves which will rescue the remaining MIAs, Trautman finds the heroic hunk pondering the corruption of all the superpowers and exhorts him not to hate his country. With a visible lump in his throat, Stallone stares out of a huge close-up and gasps the stirring punch line: 'All I want, and all every guy who ever fought in Vietnam wants, is for our country to love us as much as we love it.'

America has proved that it loves *Rambo*. The devotion is demonstrated by an overwhelming box-office take, and a boom in such related items as Rambo war toys, Rambo vitamins and door-kicking Rambo-grams. The success of George Pan Cosmatos' film is all the more surprising, and hence significant, in that Ted Kotcheff's *First Blood*, adapted from David Morrell's brilliant novel, was only a minor hit when released on the domestic market in 1982. The commercial impetus for a sequel came mainly from the success of the original, retitled *Rambo*, in such European markets as France and Italy. It is perhaps because of this that *Rambo—First Blood, Part II* looks a lot like a skilful, extremely expensive version of the colourful and violent jungle pot-boilers turned out for some time now by Anthony M. Dawson. Unlike *First Blood*, which is one of the Vietnam-vet-cracks-up cycle, *Rambo* belongs to a more recent strain, the MIA movie.

The notion that there are still American POWs in Vietnam owes much to the activities of Lieutenant-Colonel 'Bo' Gritz, an American mercenary whose abortive real-life sortie into Laos in search of MIA camps was supported, it is rumoured, by Clint Eastwood so that the star would have an exciting news item upon which to hang a red-baiting movie. The raid was a fiasco, and Eastwood made *Firefox* instead, but the theme was still considered congenial Hollywood material, partly perhaps because the failures of Gritz and the Iranian rescue mission were outweighed by the television success of *The A-Team*. Rambo's triumphant retrieval of a handful of dazed prisoners is in effect a duplication of the efforts of Gene Hackman in *Uncommon Valor*, produced by John Milius, and Chuck Norris in Cannon's cheap *Missing in Action*. The Golan-Globus advertising slogan was 'The war's not over until the last man's home!', which signals more than anything the purpose of the MIA movie: to rediscover honour from the mess of

Vietnam and, more than a decade after the fact, to provide a make-believe victory in place of the humiliating, cinematically untenable defeat. Early in *Rambo*, the hero speaks for the filmmakers and the audience by asking, apropos his return to South-East Asia, 'Do we get to win this time?'

During the guilt-ridden aftermath of Vietnam, the Hollywood war film was characterised by anti-military ironies such as *M*A*S*H*, but the most successful film of all time, *Star Wars*, was a not-so-disguised exercise in the traditional 'guts and glory' ethic. In Vietnam, America was forced into playing the role of the evil Galactic Empire, a well-armed, technologically superior, morally dodgy power finally defeated by a band of resourceful, popular, ill-equipped guerrillas. *Star Wars* allowed America to side with the rebels again; it also introduced the image of the military that has become dominant in 80s cinema—the soldier as messiah. Luke Skywalker is the epitome of Christ Militant, a young nobody trained in the use of arms and the fulfilment of his psychic potential who gets to save the universe. George Lucas also wrote, with John Milius, the original story of *Apocalypse Now*, and might thus be thought responsible for introducing a brand of doggy mysticism into the earth-bound war movie. Milius proceeded, in *Red Dawn*, to present Powers Boothe as the most blatant of the military messiahs—a wounded airman whose inspiration turns a bunch of high-school kids into a crack guerrilla unit. He passes on his specialised knowledge to his disciples and then dies so that they might live.

Rambo establishes its hero's semi-divinity simply through the superhuman presence of Sylvester Stallone. He brings to the role not only his sleeker-than-Schwarzenegger physique but the brooding intensity developed during three *Rocky* movies. We are told that Rambo is 'half-Indian, half-German—a hell of a combination.' After Murdock has recalled the rescue helicopter and left Rambo stranded on his own Golgotha, Stallone gets to be crucified twice—in leech-infested pig manure and on an electrified bed of springs. He resists Steven Berkoff's temptations and refuses to give up his faith in the father who has forsaken him, and, by virtue of his victory against overwhelming odds, re-establishes the cinematic notion of guts and glory.

It is a little too easy to interpret the recent revival of right-wing war scenarios in American fictions as a simple endorsement of Reaganite ideals. Rambo may be a patriot, but he is also a psychopath who cannot be accommodated in peacetime America; the only possible homes for him are prisons or combat zones. Similarly, the invasion fantasies of *Red Dawn* and the television series *V* are rooted in a deep distaste for

the State of the Union as it actually is. When the Red Army or the iguanaform Visitors arrive to take over America, it is as much a liberation as an oppression. Like Rambo, the heroes of *Red Dawn* and *V* get to throw over their everyday lot as the backbone of a complacent America and head for the hills, the spiritual heirs of Jeremiah Johnson and Teddy Roosevelt. *Rambo* takes the theme even further by presenting a hero so far gone that he cannot even derive the aesthetic pleasures from his exploits offered to his audience.

But the film's extraordinary success has less to do with its politics than with its skilled deployment of the napalm

aesthetic. The explosions of *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Red Dawn* and *Rambo* are as beautiful, terrifying and abstract as anything in *Fantasia*, and *Apocalypse Now* is largely responsible for giving Vietnam the rock opera/Marvel Comics image exploited in *Rambo*. The film opens with a quarry being dynamited for a chain gang, and it proceeds to linger lovingly over exploding arrow-heads, specially designed knives, high-tech Soviet helicopters, rattat-tatting machine guns, burning jungles, and hordes of spectacularly disposable extras: not so much an ambiguous wish-fulfilment fantasy as the *ne plus ultra* of the explosion movie. □

Sparing no hint of verismo

Queen Kelly/Tom Milne

Hitherto, prints of *Queen Kelly* have ended, satisfactorily if unsatisfyingly, with Gloria Swanson's despairing leap from the bridge (followed, in the version issued by Swanson in 1931, by a coda not directed by Stroheim in which Prince Wolfram made it a double suicide). Although the watchman is seen jumping to the rescue, making it obvious that the convent-bred innocent deflowered by her princely admirer would in fact be saved and go on to justify the title through her subsequent metamorphosis into Queen Kelly, it worked well enough as a typical Hollywood tale of the bitter-sweet wages

of sin, rendered untypical by the magnificence, the daring and the detail of Stroheim's imagery. The sense of dissatisfaction lay in the lack of any clue, even if one knew in broad outline how the story was to continue, as to how Stroheim would contrive to escalate this somewhat linear bitter-sweet ambience into his own uniquely characteristic blend (cf *The Wedding March*) composed of equal parts of pure cynicism and pure romanticism.

The present version of *Queen Kelly* (Contemporary), 'restored' by Kino International with the aid of titles, stills and some fifteen minutes of footage from the African sequences shot by Stroheim before Swanson called a halt to the production, offers at least some of the answers. Easy to recognise the Stroheim touch in the arbitrarily cruel hand of fate which, not content with toppling Patricia Kelly from the ecstasy of her tryst with Prince Wolfram into the agony of being whipped from the palace by the mad queen, imagines the ultimate degradation of forced marriage to a filthy, gin-sodden, slaveringly lecherous and ageing cripple.

Stroheim spares no hint of verismo in the accumulation of squalor, which makes it unequivocally clear that the establishment Patricia Kelly is to inherit from her dying aunt in Dar-Es-Salaam is more bordello than dance-hall or gin-mill. He adds the final turn of the screw by having Tully Marshall, as the obscenely lascivious cripple, scuttle around Swanson on his crutches like some repellent arachnoid ensuring that the fly caught in his web is too securely enmeshed to escape. Directed with extraordinary intensity, almost gloatingly revelling in details of sweaty venality and squalid sexuality, these scenes arouse a sense of physical revulsion which is almost tangible, as events proceed inexorably towards what is in effect a wedding funeral. As the last rites are administered to the dying aunt,

Gloria Swanson (Patricia Kelly).



Patricia and the cripple, assembled at her bedside as chief mourners, are first pledged to each other by the dying woman and then married as she literally croaks on the sidelines. Yet unexpectedly and almost inexplicably, the glittering splendours of the royal palace from the first half of the film are echoed, dimly but unmistakably, as the dingy African shack is transformed not only by the pristine whiteness of the black priest's robes, the pyx, orb and censer wielded by his acolytes, the candles that soften the harsh light, the flowers that bring memories of romance, but by the gracefully flowing lines of the mosquito net pressed into service as a wedding veil for the bride.

Although Stroheim's extravagance is generally cited as the main reason why production was halted on *Queen Kelly* with more than half the film still to be shot, Gloria Swanson's autobiography innocently reveals that moral outrage was an equally important factor. Already shocked to realise, in viewing the rushes, that Stroheim had slipped in a reaction shot of Walter Byron (as Prince Wolfram) amusedly sniffing the drawers that Patricia Kelly hurls at him in embarrassment after inadvertently losing them on their first encounter, Swanson revealingly commented, 'Since everything else was so beautiful, I decided not to exercise my veto on the matter until the proper time came.' But

the African scenes evidently brought that proper time forward, since they seemed to her not only 'rank and sordid and ugly'—which they were—but 'utterly unrelated to the European scenes and the characters in them'—which is nonsense unless one is thinking in terms of pure Hollywood convention.

On the contrary, in fact, the African scenes are clearly designed as a mirror image reflecting the European ones, and demonstrating the extent to which a little cosmetic decoration—like the perfume once used by aristocrats to mask the odour of unwashed bodies—can transform ugliness into beauty. Throughout the first half of the film, in the context furnished by Seena Owen's marvellous mad queen—the very epitome of Stroheimian-Ruritanian degeneracy—Prince Wolfram seems more sinned against than sinning. Although he is first seen falling off his horse in a drunken stupor after a night of debauchery with his military cronies and some complaisant courtesans, and although he engineers the seduction of innocent Patricia Kelly with the cunning of a master, he can still play the romantic hero since he is presented as another helpless fly struggling against the spider of Queen Regina's cruelly selfish whims and jealousies. Yet his cigar butts *do* litter the ashtray in her bedroom with their betraying presence; and when his mirror image is presented

in the person of the crippled trader, one is invited to wonder just how far the queen's madness is a reaction to the cooling of what may once have been his ardent passion, and how far his initial pursuit of Patricia Kelly—though later transformed into genuine love, perhaps simply by the overwhelming ambience of moonlight, roses and innocence—was motivated by the same pure lust that activates the cripple.

With this intimation that the idyllic tryst between Patricia and Wolfram in the palace heralded not only her downfall but also his first step on the road to redemption, a characteristically romantic Stroheim schema is adumbrated whereby the ex-roué and the new brothel madam could meet again—and love—on equal terms. Unlike the original prints, this reconstituted version makes for a satisfying conception but unsatisfactory viewing, in that the 'reconstitution' brings the truncation of the film even more forcefully to mind than before. With explanatory titles swept aside by the overwhelming intensity of the images, *Queen Kelly* now leaves one nursing, willy-nilly, a sense of disgust at the gleeful miserabilism which abandons poor Patricia Kelly to rot in the clutches of a monster. One would not willingly dispense with the pleasure afforded by the African footage; but one is, in a sense, further from Stroheim's intention than ever. □



Birmingham Film and Television Festival: 85

THE CITY EXPERIENCE

October 24 - November 2 1985

The Festival, the first of its kind for Birmingham, will include:

- ♥ New Releases and Premieres
- ♥ Special Previews
- ♥ A City in the Cinema Retrospective
- ♥ A Children's Programme
- ♥ Day Events and Awards
- ♥ Black Film Forum
- ♥ Television's City Fictions

The events will take place at numerous venues across the city.

Programme details from September on.

Information from Roger Shannon (Festival Co-ordinator)
c/o Birmingham City Council, Dept. of Recreation, Auchinleck House,
Five Ways, Birmingham phone 021-235 3008/021-359 5545 (BFVW)
(with financial support from Birmingham City Council).

Inner London Education Authority

ST. MARTIN'S SCHOOL OF ART

CNNA POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN FINE ART FILM AND VIDEO

Two years part-time

A new course starting in January 1986, aimed at film and video-makers who are working (or who intend to work) within the independent sector of film and video production. It aims to enable students to develop their creative practice and extend their theoretical and critical awareness, through a programme of lectures, seminars, tutorials and a workshop attachment scheme.

Applicants should be practising film/video-makers who are working within the London area.

Applications for entry in January 1986 should be made no later than 8 November 1985.

Further details of the course, entry requirements and fees are available from:

General Office, St. Martin's School of Art,
107 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0DU.
Telephone: 01-437 0611.

Labour of Hercules

FILM MAKING IN
1930s BRITAIN

by Rachael Low

Allen & Unwin/£12.95

Or, if a subtitle were needed, *From Abdul the Damned to Ysani the Princess*—these being the alpha and omega of the book's concluding film list. *Abdul*, the first British venture of the ambitious producer Max Schach, featured Fritz Kortner scowling away amidst grandiose sets in the story of a Turkish despot's downfall; both plot and personnel made this something of a German émigré's dream. *Ysani the Princess*, it turns out, was a short stunt film; the heroine, a mummy, told the audience's fortune via a live interlocutor in the cinema. As British films of the 30s go, these seem as crazily typical as any; so many exotic flowers bloomed during the period, and we have all been anxiously waiting for Rachael Low's *History of the British Film* to guide us through the production jungle, identifying and explaining the flora and fauna.

But before the volume is assessed, the history of the *History* should be rehearsed, for with this publication Rachael Low's Herculean and amazing labours have come to an end. They began in 1946 when the British cinema was temporarily enjoying another euphoric 'renaissance' period. The British Film Institute, faced by a dearth of native documentation, established a History Research Committee, chaired by Cecil Hepworth, to instigate 'an authentic history of the British cinema both as an art and an industry.' The first volume, covering 1896 to 1906 and co-written with Roger Manvell, emerged in 1948—a piquant reminder of humble origins to an industry still basking in the wartime admissions boom and pumping out much lumbering twaddle. Further volumes appeared in 1949 and 1950, taking the story up to 1918; the surviving films and resources may have multiplied in the intervening years, but Rachael Low had the unique advantage of talking to many surviving veterans, among them Will Barker, G. A. Smith, R. H. Cricks, Maurice Elvey, Hepworth and Pearson.

After that, the *History* marked time, along with British cinema itself, coming alive again at the end of the 50s. Research progress was slow, and in 1964 Allen & Unwin published a stopgap

volume by Charles Oakley, *Where We Came In*, which cantered through available facts, figures and films up to the first twitches of the Swinging Sixties. Finally, in 1971, Rachael Low unburdened herself of the years 1918 to 1929; eight years later, she encompassed the 30s non-fiction output in two small volumes. And now here is *Abdul*, Ysani and friends, appearing on the scene when British production is riding another crest of another wave, and a growing army of new researchers and students are exploring the Aladdin's Cave of film history.

Superficially, *Film Making in 1930s Britain* takes note of the new climate. Sir Richard Attenborough's foreword uses the example of past quota legislation to sound the wailing siren about the inadequacy of present Government attitudes to the industry. But the author's method remains nobly unaffected by marketing hooks, present concerns and critical fashions. By the third paragraph she is already knee-deep in the statistics of cinema admissions, and her passion for the precise fact and figure never wavers.

For the reader seeking a good smooth read, the method brings mixed results. How pleasant, for instance, to know that fittings for the country house at Pinewood came from the liner *Mauretania*, or that the middle name of the screenwriter Gordon Wellesley was Wong. But what can the imagination make of '6 per cent cumulative participating preference ordinary shares', or the details of Max Schach's three Westminster Bank overdrafts? The majestic accumulation of facts weighs particularly heavy at times through the pile-up of overgrown sentences: so many straggling, putative subordinate clauses require pruning back or complete re-potting. At other times, words are deliciously chosen. Note the careful gradation in the capsule comment on Anna Neagle ('a woman of some talent, great popularity and remarkable character'), or the lethal sentence on Lady Technicolor, Natalie Kalmus: 'She insisted on rigorous training and high standards, and made her wishes felt on the set.'

Schach's overdrafts, in fact, turn out to be important stepping-stones in a calamitous story of financial mismanagement that increasingly darkens the book's pages. The *History's* exhaustive, objective manner has generally blanketed any personal response from the author, or the sharp bones of narrative argument, but here we sniff with relief the presence, almost, of a villain. The myth has been that Korda's extravagance catapulted City finance into reckless investment

and burnt fingers, but Rachael Low puts the blame squarely on Schach and a finance group called the Aldgate Trustees, who triggered the crisis by funnelling money into a rash of new production ventures with little rhyme, reason or collateral to guide them. In 1939, when the bubble had burst, Westminster Bank prepared suits against fifteen insurance companies which had guaranteed loans; some companies retaliated by pressing counter-claims, arguing that the bank should have exerted more surveillance. The case, Rachael Low relates, was settled out of court, and Schach disappeared in a puff of misfortune, leaving nothing but losses and a batch of largely misconceived films with a strong continental flavour which did little to further the industry's artistic standards.

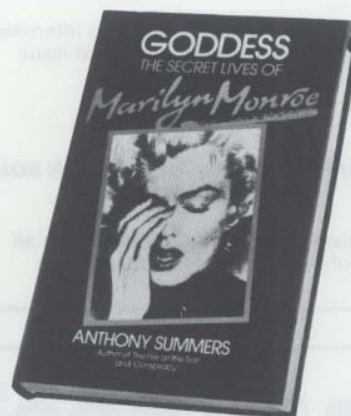
The other chief bogey haunting the pages is the quota legislation for British (or Empire) products, first introduced in the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act. British cinema lived with its repercussions for years afterwards, and Rachael Low recounts with fascinating detail the shameful activities of individual renters and American companies, clogging up the market with worthless, cheap fodder to fulfil at least the letter of the law;

MGM comes in for particularly sharp words. American companies hover over the entire book: with their expertise, glamour, huge financial resources and vast home market, they served variously as exemplar, thorn in the side and cagey partner in production and distribution deals that invariably favoured themselves.

Elsewhere, labour organisation and the technical developments of sound and colour receive valuable, cogent coverage, though there is less than one might expect on pre-production censorship and the pervading cultural climate (a topic touched on briefly, along with the birth of the British Film Institute, in *Documentary and Educational Films of the 1930s*). But the flaws, knotty sentences and occasional misspelt names and titles seem of little account when weighed in the balance of the entire *History*. It took just one valiant, indefatigable person to sift through and document some forty years of British cinema, most of it virgin territory for film scholarship. The next stage of the project, covering far more familiar ground, will require the film studies departments of two universities (East Anglia, Kent), and a relay team of writers.

GEOFF BROWN

'Like Giraudoux's Ondine, she is only fifteen years old, but what will happen with the years?' — Cecil Beaton



With disturbing new evidence, Anthony Summers, 'one of the most skilled investigative reporters writing today' (Norman Mailer), reveals the answers: disaster in love, psychiatric collapse, drug addiction, a final volcanic involvement with the Kennedy brothers that put the presidency in jeopardy, and a tragic death.

GODDESS is the definitive, documented biography of Marilyn Monroe.

Publication on 21 October
£12.95

Available from the Motion Picture Bookshop, National Film Theatre, South Bank, London SE1, and from all leading bookshops.

Gollancz



STRANGER THAN FICTION

a documentary about
Mass Observation

directed by Ian Potts

Screening and platform discussion with
Charles Madge, Humphrey Spender,
Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan
to take place at:

NFT
South Bank
London SE1
Fox Office
01-928 3232

on October
14 and 17

Cornerhouse Cinema
Manchester

Box Office
061-228 6255

on November 6

For Sales/Distribution contact:

Liz Reddish 29 Rathbone Street
BFI Production London W1P 1AG



PRODUCTION

STAGE and SCREEN

*My revised and enlarged Catalogue of Books,
Magazines and Ephemera on the Cinema and Theatre
is now titled as above and issued eight times a year.*

Two first-class stamps (overseas: two international
reply vouchers) bring the current issue
and subscription details.

A. E. COX

21 CECIL ROAD, ITCHEN, SOUTHAMPTON SO2 7HX
Tel: 0703-447989

*I am always interested in purchasing all
out-of-print cinema books, etc.*

film/tv books 100s secondhand/ o.p. books/mags

catalogue: 50p stamps (3 intl postal reply coupons)

decorum books
24 Cloudesley Square London N1

BOOK REVIEWS

Available light

A MAN WITH A CAMERA
by Nestor Almendros

translated by
Rachel Phillips Belash

Faber and Faber/£9.95 (paper)

I have long suspected that the cameraman Nestor Almendros and I shared not only similar beginnings but also a similar approach to film-making. It was gratifying then, to begin on a personal note, to find this confirmed by *A Man with a Camera*. I should add, however, that this absorbing book is not just for professionals.

Nestor Almendros' career proper began in his adoptive country of France, but his interest in cinema dates from his early childhood in Barcelona when he was taken to see Capra's *Lost Horizon*; and later he was 'enormously impressed' by the films of Murnau and Fritz Lang. He reached Paris in 1961, after studying in New York and Rome and shooting numerous documentaries for the Cuban state film department ICAIC before becoming disenchanted with Castro's regime. The New Wave was in full swing but his only contacts were with Henri Langlois and Mary Meerson at the Cinémathèque Française.

For three years he eked out a living, giving Spanish lessons and taking odd work, before chance gave him his first job as a cameraman. He was present at the shooting of Eric Rohmer's episode of *Paris vu par...* when a quarrel resulted in the departure of the director of photography. Barbet Schroeder, the producer, could not find a replacement on the spot, so Nestor spoke up, 'I am a cameraman,' and was given his chance for one day only. The rushes satisfied, however, and he went on to complete Rohmer's sketch and to shoot the whole of Jean Douchet's *Saint-Germain-des-Près*.

A Man with a Camera covers all Almendros' films between 1964 and 1982. Some merit only a couple of pages, but his work with Rohmer and Truffaut is described in telling detail. Rohmer and Truffaut both set great store by their art directors, choosing colour schemes very carefully in collaboration with their cinematographer, and often using paintings by the Old Masters as a guideline (as did Robert Benton, incidentally, on *Kramer vs Kramer*). Some of these films were made in black and white, and Mr Almendros regrets, as I do, that commercial considera-

tions nowadays usually rule out its use.

It is interesting to learn that most of Rohmer's films were made with a minuscule crew, something that the unions have always made impossible in Britain, and that on *La Collectionneuse* the astonishing stock ratio of 1.5:1 was achieved by meticulous preparation and rehearsal, rarely shooting more than one take. Many scenes were filmed as *plans-séquence*, i.e. one continuous shot, which might take most of the day to prepare, but would in the end save time.

It was his work with Rohmer and Truffaut which first brought Almendros to notice in the States. His chapter on *Days of Heaven*, for which he won an Academy Award, is the most comprehensive. The Hollywood crews were at first hostile to his unfamiliar approach to lighting, as he used natural or 'available light' extensively, even going as far as shooting interiors with hardly any lamps, just 'bouncing' the sun through the windows with large mirrors. He details how he first explored these techniques in his French films: necessity was often the mother of invention. In America he also had to get used to a camera operator, having previously always operated the camera himself, something the unions in the States generally do not allow. I was glad to learn I wasn't alone in finding it hard to leave the detailed framing to another person.

When working with novice directors, Mr Almendros believes it is important to 'help discreetly, without using any technical blackmail, as some people do... A director of photography must never, least of all in a case like this, demand anything; he must only suggest.' He reports that returning to France to shoot *Pauline à la Plage* for Rohmer and *Vivement, Dimanche!* for Truffaut, after his high-budget work in the States, 'was guaranteed to produce in me a feeling of humility,' and that, after winning an Oscar, he realised he must resist 'all temptations that might lure me away from my basic principles... to go on accepting only what seems to fit with my original idea of good cinema, all other considerations aside.'

This otherwise excellent book is slightly marred by the indifferent reproduction of the stills, which reveal little of the quality of Almendros' work, and by a sometimes awkward translation. In particular, the technical terms have not always been given their normal English equivalents, which makes some of the valuable technical information hard to absorb.

WALTER LASSALLY

Company history

THE BRITISH BOARD OF FILM CENSORS:

Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950

by James C. Robertson

Croom Helm/£16.95

With the transformation of the British Board of Film Censors into a service enterprise, with a changed and less menacing name, and of its secretary into a chief executive, the Board's amateur phase is now firmly behind it. Indeed, for the last few years a new professionalism has been discernible in many censor boards across the world. It is an appropriate time, then, for the 'company history' to be written. To do this a great deal of research is still necessary. The legal work has been done, more or less; the social and political aspects have been nibbled at, usually in a partisan manner; the economics have not been touched or even contemplated yet; and the aesthetics have been briefly alluded to only in dribs and drabs as part of general film history.

James Robertson provides some valuable pieces for this jigsaw. He has examined and analysed the surviving records of the BBFC (both published reports and internal archive documents) and supplemented this rich treasure with extensive research in the Public Record Office—mainly Home Office but also Foreign Office, Ministry of Information and Cabinet papers, and also some parliamentary material.

Unfortunately he has not researched more widely than that, and in his somewhat jejune attempts to place the results of his research in a broader perspective he has relied upon too few secondary sources, so that his value judgments are unreliable and sometimes tendentious, and even anachronistic as when he applies modern concepts of racism and sexism to films of the First and Second World Wars. In general this book reflects the IAHIST school of film history, which has brought the discipline of social and political historians to study of the cinema and is a refreshing source of new awareness but which, in its striving to apply rigorous principles of historical scholarship, fights shy generally of any aesthetic judgment. Thus Robertson from time to time tries to place the doings of the Board in context by devoting a paragraph or two to a catalogue of political events, but never in the context of film history proper.

Robertson's knowledge of film history is slightly suspect. He ignores *Broken Blossoms* when writing of anti-Chinese racialism; his references to censorship on grounds of crime before *Underworld* are very general, with no apparent awareness of the enormous censorship impact of the serials; the inflow into Britain of French films in the late 1940s was not particularly due to the US boycott in 1947-48 and did not consist primarily of 'dubious French films' (which ones?) but of wartime and prewar films of which we had been starved for five years, and which in any case were mainly shown in specialised London cinemas. Symptomatically, there is virtually no overlap with Rachael Low's 18-page chapter on censorship in her excellent recent book *Film Making in 1930s Britain*—the two authors might be writing about quite different events.

Nevertheless, and in spite of its misleading subtitle, this book will be an essential reference source for the work of the Board, particularly its operating structure and habits. One of its *trouvailles* is the revelation of the individual examiners and their different personalities; surprisingly, however, Brooke Wilkinson, secretary of the Board for much of the period covered by the book, still remains a shadowy figure in spite of a valiant and valuable 3-page critique of his influence in the final chapter.

The very full discussion of the decisions of the Board and the attempt to draw from them an attitudinal pattern shaped according to theme (crime, religion, miscegenation, Germany and Nazism, images of the East, nudity and sex, etc) is unique but suffers from the lack of adequate outside context, so that it does not really give the whole picture. The discussion of the origins of the 1909 Act plays down the fire danger in cinemas and suggests that the true motive was really censorship but does not give adequate evidence for such an important shift in historical judgment. On the Second World War, however, Robertson is superb. This is a difficult period in censorship history, largely owing to the problems of accessing and handling the sources, but Robertson treads a clear path, describing the relations between the Government (Ministry of Information) and the Board with clarity and understanding.

As a whole, and treated with care, this book provides a valuable addition to the literature on British film censorship. Most of it is original or not easily found elsewhere and is important. But it is not a complete history of the Board and even less a history of film censorship in Britain.

NEVILLE HUNTINGS

Don Allen FINALLY TRUFFAUT



The first full-length treatment of François Truffaut's films since his death in 1984 at the age of 52.

"A model of sensitive, observant, unpretentious criticism, an ideal kind of guide to his subject... an illuminating monograph."

Encounter

October

£12.95

François Truffaut HITCHCOCK



This definitive study of one of the greatest film directors of all time was revised throughout by Truffaut who added a final chapter taking the story to Hitchcock's death. The book is a monument to two outstandingly creative men.

September

Secker & Warburg

£18.00

Haverfordians

SIR,—I knew that it was a mistake to take SIGHT AND SOUND to bed last night since it is always the most stimulating journal to drop through this letter-box. This insomniac was immediately condemned to further hours of wild imaginings on seeing that a P. Greenfield of this town has come to the defence of Peter Richards, also a Haverfordian, to attack Heurtebise in the cinema versus tv debate. Could there be a conspiracy, you might wonder? Is Greenfield really Richards? Is Gordon also Richards, jockeying for position?

I just want to point out that from September until March the only place that they will be able to see films by Hitchcock, Kasdan, Wenders, Ivory, Dennis Hopper, not to mention *Little Ida*, *Rue Cases Nègres* and *Cal*, within two and a half thousand miles in South West Wales, in comfort, with first-class projection, no popcorn, no hooligans, good refreshments and discussion after each show, will be at the Haverfordwest Film Society which meets at the County Library.

Surely Film Societies go a long way to filling the gap between tv/video and the lack of decent commercial outlets, especially in rural areas. The only shame is that Film Societies tend to be seasonal operations. It grieves me sorely that most of the films discussed in your pages are never to be seen within a hundred miles of this place, and I wish that British Film Year was going to improve matters, but it isn't. No Exhibitions, No Film Industry.

Yours faithfully,
MALCOLM GORDON
Cultural Services Department
Haverfordwest

Picturegoer

SIR,—Going through my collection of *Picturegoers*, I discover the following facts. They were advocating the countrywide screening of continental films way back in the late 30s. They often gave extensive review space to outstanding foreign language movies. They gave extensive coverage protesting at the manner in which *Kane* and *Ambersons* were being withdrawn from the circuits. They were very pro Orson Welles.

It was through this magazine, and its excellent readers' columns, that I learned about the great German silent cinema. Articles on people like Agnes Moorehead and Anne Revere had as much space as those on Betty Grable and Lana Turner. Their articles on Celia Johnson, Dana Andrews, Alexis Smith, Claire Trevor and John Clements were never bettered. The mention of Andrews reminding me that they

gave excellent reviews to *The Ox-Bow Incident*. They also infinitely preferred readers to go and see *Hangmen Also Die* and *The Moon Is Down*, as opposed to the nonsense of *North Star* and Flynn's *Desperate Journey*. And no magazine of a *Photoplay* or *Picture Show* nature would give a double-page spread decrying the neglect of Lena Horne because of colour. But perhaps Bob Baker was too immature to remember this.

Oh, yes, the magazine did come apart in the 50s. But previous to that it superbly bridged the gap between a more predictably powerful *Now*, *Voyager* and the more shattering world of Welles. Bob Baker should look *Picturegoer* up in its heyday sometime!

Yours faithfully,
NORTON EVANS
Burry Port, Dyfed

SIR,—That article on the last days of *Picturegoer* (Summer 1985) was a fine old piece of myth-kicking. But it never really knew what it was all about.

The trouble was that, although film enthusiasts wrote for it, Odhams directors were much more interested in mopping up the teenage gravy. That is the cynical, commercial fact. Out in the cold, unsubsidised world these terrible things do happen.

I now look forward to the story of the decline and fall of *Sight and Sound* and *Monthly Film Bulletin*... preferably written by Alexander Walker.

Yours faithfully,
TOM HUTCHINSON
London N6 5DY

The Man Who Knew Too Much

SIR,—Bravo Philip French in the Spring issue on Hitchcock's two versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. The 1956 remake, indeed, has always struck me as a plainly bad film in every way. Its celebrated Albert Hall sequence, for instance, goes on forever and is tedious in the extreme, not to say poorly directed: Doris Day just stands there and weeps, to no dramatic purpose, and 'suspense' does not exist. The 1956 film was also, I feel, a low point in the career of its celebrated composer, Bernard Herrmann. Films like this bring out the Richard Grenier in me (in his March 1983 piece on the Spoto biography in the *New York Times Book Review*, he virtually dismissed every Hitchcock film as 'arbitrary, contrived, false, mechanical').

Then, I recall the indeed 'crisp, unpretentious, consistently gripping' 1934 original, and I feel better.

Yours faithfully,
DAN BATES
Dallas, Texas

P & P

SIR,—Having had the privilege of starting my career in the cutting rooms on *A Canterbury Tale*, I went to the Guardian Lecture on 28 July eagerly anticipating renewing my memories of Powell and Pressburger and of two happy years with The Archers at Denham Studios.

In the event I, and I would think most of those present, was deeply disappointed with the presentation. Microphones that did not work; much of what Emeric Pressburger said inaudible; a chairman who, although presumably an expert on P & P, seemed to have no control over the content; Martin Scorsese acting as unpaid boom-swinging. Was it really necessary to subject those elderly gentlemen to all that getting up and off the stage during the extracts?

Embarrassing for P & P and the audience. NFT do get your act together.

Yours faithfully,
JIM POPE
Thames Television

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *Plenty*, *Rambo*.

RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Prizzi's Honour*, *The Emerald Forest*.

THORN EMI for *Dreamchild*.

20th CENTURY FOX for *Let's Make Love*.

20th CENTURY FOX/SARAH QUILL for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* team.

20th CENTURY FOX/CATHERINE ASHMORE for *Loose Connections*.

UIP for photograph of Michael Cimino.

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Detective*.

CANNON GALA for *Eclipse*.

CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Queen Kelly*.

VIRGIN FILMS for *Ran*.

MAINLINE/ANDREW HOLLIGAN for photograph of the Screen on the Hill.

THE OTHER CINEMA for *Je Vous Salue, Marie*.

PALACE PICTURES for photograph of Simon Relph.

MIP for *A Room with a View*.

UMBRELLA FILMS for photograph of Conny Templeman.

PACIFIC FILMS/GOLDENEYE/CHALLENGE CORPORATE SERVICES for *Leave All Fair*.

CINEMA PAPERS for Australian television stills.

JUDY TARLO ASSOCIATES for photograph of Samuel Goldwyn Jr.

TOPHAM PICTURE LIBRARY for photographs of John Logie Baird, Philo T. Farnsworth.

HULTON PICTURE LIBRARY for Marconi/EMI camera.

EMI MUSIC ARCHIVES for photograph of Isaac Schoenberg.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DR MARC GERVAIS is Professor of Film in the Department of Communications Studies at Concordia University, Montreal, and part-time Commissioner with the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission... MAX HASTINGS was a BBC TV reporter from 1970-73, and has made documentaries for BBC and ITV; he contributes to the *Sunday Times* and is writing a book on the Korean war... PATRICK MCGILLIGAN has written for many magazines including *The Velvet Light Trap*, *Jump Cut*, *Film Quarterly* and *Film Comment*; his best known book is *Cagney: The Actor as Auteur*... KIM NEWMAN is a London-based freelance writer and regular contributor to *City Limits* and the *MFB*. Has recently published *Nightmare Movies*; a critical history of the horror film since 1968... WALLY OLINS is Chairman of Wolff Olins, Corporate Identity Design Consultants... CHRIS PEACHMENT is film editor of *Time Out*.

NHK/CBS for photograph of high definition TV camera.

BBC TV for *A.D.*

CHANNEL 4 for *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

GRANADA TELEVISION/LESLIE WOODHEAD for *The Mursi Trilogy*.

JOHN CARTWRIGHT for photograph of Istanbul Jury.

GEORGE MILNER-SMITH for photograph of Simon Perry and the Regal Cinema.

TONY RAYNS for *Paradise View*.

BARRY SALT for *The Physician of the Castle*.

BFI PRODUCTION for *Stranger Than Fiction*.

NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *Bachelor Mother*, *The Richest Girl in the World*, *Princess O'Rourke*, *The Flame of New Orleans*, *The March of Time*, *Anthony and Anna*, photographs of the Curzon Cinema, Empire Leicester Square, Marshall McLuhan, Louis de Rochemont, Norman Krasna.

PRINTED BY The Jason Press Ltd., Hertford, England.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION RATES. (4 issues) £7.00 including postage. Back issues, where available, at current price (£1.75 including postage and packing). U.S.A. \$14.00. Price per copy in United States \$3.50. Back issues \$3.50.

Binders to hold two years' issues £5.25, postage included (\$10.50).

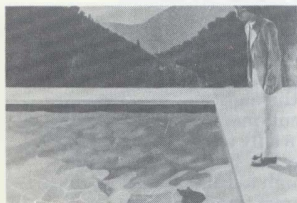
SOLE AGENTS FOR U.S.A.: Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1671 East 16th Street, Suite 176, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11229-2901.

PUBLICATION DATES: 1st January, April, July and October.

Direct Cinema Limited Films & Video

BRITISH INDEPENDENT FILMS

A Bigger Splash



A BIGGER SPLASH is a penetrating impression of the art and lifestyle of David Hockney – one of the most brilliant and successful painters of our time. It is also a new kind of feature film, in which real people play themselves in both actual and dramatized situations.

Produced, directed, written and photographed by Jack Hazan
Written and edited by David Mingay
Presented by Mike Kaplan as a Lagoon release for Circle Associates Ltd.
105 minutes Color

Couples and Robbers

Ladd Company

**Academy Award Nomination
Best Short Film 1981**



Two couples, one with all the riches dreams are made, and one with only dreams and schemes, are unexpectedly brought together by the plotting of the poorer couple. This charming and sophisticated comedy reveals much about contemporary values.

"Witty and memorable, masterfully directed and performed."
Sheila Benson, *L.A. Times*

Written and directed by Clare Peploe

Produced by C. Oestreicher
29 minutes Color 1984

The Fetch It

A Film by James Hill



THE FETCH IT is a whimsical short story of a writer who is kept from his work by the constant interruptions of his playful dog, Bumble. As his master loses interest in the time-worn game of "fetch-the-ball", Bumble heightens the contest, threatening his position as man's best friend.

18 minutes Color 1984

Rub A Dub Dub



RUB A DUB DUB is a very special collection of animated nursery rhymes for preschool and primary school children. These twenty-five short films are filled with fun, music, and lively invention. America's favorite nursery stories are perfectly presented here for the quick minds of small children.

Produced by David Yates in association with Media Home Entertainment
5 to 6 minutes each Color 1985

A Shocking Accident



A Flamingo Picture
**Academy Award 1982
Best Short Film**



From the short story, A SHOCKING ACCIDENT by Graham Greene, an English school boy learns that his father has been killed in a bizarre accident. His friends tease him and years later his aunt still relishes the tale. Only when he meets a girl who understands, can he shake off this terrible memory.

Produced by Christine Oestreicher
Directed by James Scott
25 minutes Color 1983

The Spice of Wickedness

Elkador Films



In a sly and sophisticated story of the age-old battle between the sexes, this eighteenth century period film shows how a beautiful and aristocratic wife outwits her wandering husband and gains more than his love in the bargain.

Produced by Sondra Orosz
Directed by Elka Tupiak

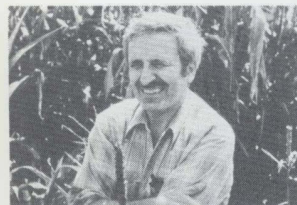
24 minutes Color 1984

AMERICAN AWARD WINNERS

The Garden of Eden

Florentine Films

**Academy Award Nomination
Best Documentary Short 1985**



This beautiful and intelligent film makes clear the need for conservation to maintain economic growth, scientific investigation, and pharmaceutical research. Using humor, logic, and stunning outdoor photography, THE GARDEN OF EDEN makes a convincing case for the preservation of our world.

A Production of the Nature Conservancy
Produced and directed by Lawrence R. Hott and Roger Sherman
28 minutes Color 1985

The Stone Carvers



**Academy Award 1985
Best Documentary Short**



THE STONE CARVERS captures the work and the infectious spirit of a small group of Italian-American artisans who have spent their lives carving beautiful and lasting works in stone for the Washington Cathedral. The film is a tribute to both personal achievement and co-operative effort.

A film by Marjorie Hunt and Paul Wagner
In Cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution Office of Folklife Programs
29 minutes Color 1985

For information contact:

Direct Cinema Limited
P.O. Box 69589
Los Angeles, CA 90069
(213) 656-4700



ON NOW

●DIM SUM

(Mainline)

Single daughters with widowed mothers are faced the world over with the dilemma of when and how to leave home. Wayne Wang, the director of *Chan Is Missing*, chooses to set his story in San Francisco among a Chinese community in which the mother is cheerfully unassimilated (the plot is put in motion by a fortune teller's prediction that she is shortly to die) while her daughter, who is touchingly fond of her, slides easily between Chinese tradition and California modernity. The daughter is unsure about marriage, though her boyfriend is a sympathetic fellow, and, in any case, she remains very doubtful of the fortune teller... Calmly paced, picked out with humour, handsomely photographed by Michael Chin (this is not a San Francisco seen before), *Dim Sum*—those multifarious Chinese comestibles—is all of a piece. It is particularly distinguished by a feeling of family, but not one which excludes strangers. The director's second wife takes a small role; his first wrote the screenplay. A real-life mother and daughter, Kim and Lauren Chew, play the central characters with a palpable depth of feeling. The main location was the widowed Mrs Chew's own home: the story is—and, of course, is not—her own and her daughter's.

●THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP

(BFI)

A sparkling new print, at the original epic length, of Powell and Pressburger's controversial wartime epic, which gave Churchill and his ministers kittens for giving new life to David Low's caricature of a buffoonish military establishment. They need not have worried: the film does give conviction and depth to the cliché of the old-school old duffer who is supposedly impeding the war effort, but then outflanks any criticism by proving that Blimp both has his reasons and a certain nobility in his old-world sense of decency and fair play. There are no real lessons here for how the war should be conducted, just an abundantly contradictory fantasy about national stereotypes and the games that inspirational film-makers will play. Propaganda, elegy, agit-prop and military fable, with professional ritual wrapped in romantic doom rather like *Barry Lyndon*: given this mixture, coherence is the last thing to look for. (Roger Livesey, Anton Walbrook, Deborah Kerr.)

●POULET AU VINAIGRE

(Virgin)

A claustrophobic little provincial

town; three local worthies plotting a shady property deal; and in the crumbling old house that is the bone of contention, a madwoman who fumes, schemes and despatches her adolescent son on nocturnal spying missions. It's Chabrol's bourgeoisie up to no good again, with murder afoot, dirty linen busily laundered, and hope for the boy arriving in the person of a girl refreshingly presented as what her 'betters' would call a common slut. A little too familiar, perhaps, but made with all Chabrol's stunning expertise and highly enjoyable. (Stéphane Audran, Michel Bouquet, Jean Poiret.)

●SUBWAY

(Artificial Eye)

An amoral drifter on the fringes of the Paris underworld, infatuated amid a swirl of melodramatic incident with a woman from a rich background... the echoes of *Breathless* in this bravura achievement (a second film by a director born the year *Breathless* was made) heighten a sense of New Wave modernity bracingly renewed. Once past a death-defying pre-credits car chase, the action, save for one perhaps mistaken *entr'acte*, is confined to the Métro and its labyrinthine 'backstage' areas. The plot takes on overtones of *Phantom of the Opera* as the anti-hero (Christopher Lambert in dinner jacket and punk-yellow hair) retreats to a secret lair from which he ventures forth to ensnare his lady fair (Isabelle Adjani), then to engineer a wild scheme to ennoble himself in her eyes. The situation reaches a predestined conclusion in a hail of bullets, but the ending remains cloaked in neo-romantic ambiguity. The calculated audacity with which CinemaScope and Dolby are used is matched by an evident skill with performers (Michel Galabru makes a wonderfully lugubrious policeman); and this is in every way an advance on director Luc Besson's previous feature, *The Last Battle*: the work not of an up and coming film-maker but of one who has resoundingly arrived. (Richard Bohringer, Jean-Pierre Bacri.)

L'ADDITION

(Cannon-Gala)

Mainly factitious update of society-is-to-blame melodrama about petty offender trapped in the coils of the judicial and penal systems, intermittently alleviated by incisive staging and a chilling performance by Richard Bohringer as a vengeful prison guard. (Richard Berry; director, Denis Amar.)

BACK TO THE FUTURE

(UIP)

Sent back to the 50s in a Heath Robinson/DeLorean time machine, teenager Michael J. Fox finds himself marooned in an Eisenhower-era small town, his mission being to unite his oddly matched parents, then awkward high-schoolers. A crowd-pleasing mix of s-f, teenage romance and pointed nostalgia. (Lea Thompson, Crispin Glover; director, Robert Zemeckis.)

THE BLACK CAULDRON

(Disney)

When the Horned King threatens to spread darkness throughout the land, it's up to a daydreaming farm boy, his psychic pig, a bumbling minstrel and assorted faerie folk to stop him. A very familiar 'young adult' fantasy, choppy animated by various hands. (Directors, Ted Berman, Richard Rich.)

BREWSTER'S MILLIONS

(UIP)

The oft-told tale of love, greed and more greed surfaces again, though the writers of *Trading Places* and the aggressively modernist Walter Hill haven't really found a place for it in modern times. Richard Pryor mugs and signals frantically, but all his activity fails to get the comedy off the ground. (John Candy, Lonette McKee.)

COCOON

(Fox)

A retirement community in Florida is the scene of a cute close encounter. Establishing a mutual aid policy, the oldies help the aliens out of their fix and are whisked away to a better world as rejuvenated Peter Pans. Very whimsical. (Wilford Brimley, Don Ameche, Hume Cronyn; director, Ron Howard.)

CRIMES OF PASSION

(Rank)

Ken Russell essays a doubtful moral tale on the dangers of repression: a prim designer (Kathleen Turner) dons a wig and becomes a do-anything night-time hooker in a flashy, pulsating urban nowhere-land. Things come to a pretty pass when a cracked preacher decides on retribution. Naive, lurid and prurient in equal parts. (Anthony Perkins.)

DESPERATELY SEEKING SUSAN

(Rank)

Amiable New York caper from Susan Seidelman, director of *Smithereens*, about a mousy housewife (Rosanna Arquette) who assumes the identity of a flaky independent woman (Madonna) fleeing shadowy bad fellows. Atmospheric neon camerawork and some agreeable performances do not compensate for plot's sometimes wilfully old-hat complications.

THE FROG PRINCE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

First love in Paris, 1961, for Home Counties teenager. Period slang and attitudes caught with affectionate humour (writer Posy Simmonds), but lack of narrative drive or satirical invention leave a wishy-washy impression. (Jane Snowden, Alexandre Sterling; director, Brian Gilbert.)

GOTCHA!

(UIP)

Unprepossessing American student in Paris falls for and in with a Czech beauty who takes him to East Berlin; international intrigue follows. A bland mix of teenage wish-fulfilment comedy and sub-Le Carré thriller. (Anthony Edwards, Linda Fiorentino; director, Jeff Kanew.)

THE HOLCROFT COVENANT

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Platitudinous, globe-trotting thriller about neo-Nazi plot for a new world order. John Frankenheimer, who two decades ago might have brought real tension to even such a hand-me-down scenario as this, cannot in the event aspire even to the level of satisfying hokum. (Michael Caine, Anthony Andrews.)

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

(Palace)

Horror fantasy in which a murdered child-molester wreaks vengeance from beyond the grave via the nightmares of his executioners' offspring. Realised, bar a silly trick ending, with an expertise brutally gratifying enough to raise doubts about its escapist function. (Ronee Blakley, John Saxon; director, Wes Craven.)

OUR STORY

(Artificial Eye)

Propositioned by a stranger on a train, Alain Delon finds himself drawn into a looking-glass world of teasing, painful illogicality that turns out rather lamely to reflect the story of their unhappy marriage. Bizarrely funny, up to a point, in the Chinese box manner of Buñuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. (Nathalie Baye; director, Bertrand Blier.)

PALE RIDER

(UIP)

In his first Western since the genre disappeared through *Heaven's Gate*, director-star Clint Eastwood proceeds, perhaps understandably, with caution. With a leaf out of his own book (the supernatural avenger from *High Plains Drifter*) and one from the classic Western (bits of *Shane*), he turns out something with grit, grandeur but little purpose. (Michael Moriarty.)

RETURN TO OZ

(Disney)

Dorothy goes back with a hen, a pumpkin man and an antiquated but game little robot. It's a hard act to follow, but director Walter Murch does a tolerable job of not breaking the spell. The scarifying moments might have upset a 1939 audience. (Fairuza Balk, Jean Marsh.)

SANTA CLAUS

(Rank)

A philanthropic 14th century woodcutter becomes present-giver-in-chief to the children of the world. A comedy-fantasy whose maniacally grinning elves, stripped pine sweatshops and bonhomie suggest that the makers haven't talked to a child in thirty years. (Dudley Moore, David Huddleston; director, Jeannot Szwarc.)

SYLVIA

(Enterprise)

A chapter from the early life of Sylvia Ashton Warner, teaching circa 1950 at a benighted New Zealand village school. Background sympathetically sketched, but the dramatic focus is fatally lacking in rigour. (Eleanor David; director, Michael Firth.)

THE NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

Among the films shown at the
39th Edinburgh International Film Festival:

Graham Johnston's documentary **TUKTU**, shot in the Eskimo township of Ambler, Alaska, 'made with love and affection' – Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*.

Maureen Scott's **REQUIEM**, shot on location and at Beaconsfield, 'is an impressive and haunting study of grief' – *Film and Television Technician*, July 1985.

Conny Templeman's **TO HELL AND BACK IN TIME FOR BREAKFAST**, shot on location in London and Paris, 'a backdrop for a version of *film-noir* which one could only call *film-bleu*. Great fun! Stylishly done' – Ian Bell, *The Scotsman*, 16th August, 1985.

'Ian Sellar's impressive graduation piece,' **ALBERT'S MEMORIAL**, shot on location on the East Coast and around Beaconsfield, 'a bracingly unsentimental story' – Philip French, *The Observer*, 25th August, 1985.

Apply to the Admissions Secretary for prospectus for the three year full-time course commencing Autumn, 1986. Closing date for receipt of applications: 31st January, 1986.

NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL (DEPT. SS), BEACONSFIELD STUDIOS,
BEACONSFIELD, BUCKS. Telephone: (04946) 71234



THE ACADEMY CINEMA ONE

presents

DEBORAH KERR · MADHUR JAFFREY
ALEC McCOWEN · ZIA MOHYEDDIN

in

THE ASSAM GARDEN_U

A MOVING PICTURE COMPANY PRODUCTION · RELEASED BY CONTEMPORARY FILMS

Directed by MARY McMURRAY